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Monday, 20 January 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Judeh	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estreme
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Asselborn
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Cho Tae-yul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nibishaka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General and the ministers and other representatives present at today's meeting. Their participation is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Brazil, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guatemala, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

Before I start, let me say just a few words on the situation regarding the talks on Syria. Participants will be aware of the latest developments concerning the Geneva conference on Syria. Intensive and urgent discussions are under way, and I will have more to say about the situation later in the day. For the moment, let me just appeal again to all involved to keep the needs of the Syrian people foremost in mind.

I have just returned from the region and my fifth visit to Iraq. The country is again facing serious threats to its stability. I discussed my concerns with many Iraqi leaders and urged all sides to remain committed to political dialogue and to uphold respect for the rule of law and human rights. I was reassured by their pledge to hold parliamentary elections as scheduled on 30 April. Today, I reiterate my message to the Iraqi political leaders to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure inclusive dialogue, social cohesion and concrete political progress.

I also visited Kuwait. I am extremely grateful to the many countries that pledged generous funding at the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference on Syria. In addition, I had a meeting with the emir of Kuwait, and I am encouraged by the improving bilateral relations between his country and Iraq. We also discussed the implementation of resolution 2107 (2013).

Turning to Lebanon, I commend President Sleiman's leadership in upholding the country's disassociation policy. That is vital to prevent the Syrian crisis from exacerbating tensions in Lebanon, as we have seen with the recent acts of terrorism and bombings. Nine years after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, last week's opening of the trial of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon is a reminder of the fight to end impunity in Lebanon.

Violations of Lebanon's border with Syria continue, including a worrying escalation of rocket firing and airstrikes into Lebanon's Bekaa region. Refugees continue to cross into Lebanon in large numbers, now totalling over 860,000 — a sixfold increase over last year.

The situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remains relatively stable thanks to the cooperation of the Lebanese and Israeli authorities to contain recent incidents. All must build on the stability that has prevailed along the Blue Line under resolution 1701 (2006).

The Security Council and the International Support Group for Lebanon have called for generous support for the humanitarian response and stabilization efforts, as well as for the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged $3 billion in assistance to the Lebanese army.

I welcome the momentum to form a Government, and encourage all parties to ensure that presidential elections are held on time. The people of Lebanon look to their leaders to work together to steer their country through this difficult time.

The year 2014 will be decisive in helping Israelis and Palestinians draw back from a perilous and unsustainable status quo. United States Secretary of State Kerry has worked diligently to lay out a framework on all core issues to address Israeli and Palestinian aspirations in a fair and balanced manner and to allow for continued negotiations towards a final status agreement. I also pay special tribute to Jordan for its essential role.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders will be required to make bold decisions and painful compromises for peace. They must prepare their peoples for these necessary steps. The failure of political progress could fuel a downward spiral on the ground. I am alarmed by recurrent violence and incitement on all sides, as well as by continued settlement activity, which is illegal under international law. Building settlements is not consistent with building a long-lasting peace agreement. Both parties must act responsibly and with restraint. Gaza also remains a cause for concern. Ultimately, a sustainable two-State solution will require Palestinians to overcome their divisions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will begin 2014 with an expected end-of-year shortfall of $67 million under its regular budget. I encourage all Member States to explore ways to strengthen their cooperation with UNRWA and provide additional funding, in particular to its regular budget.

I hope that the parties will reach a framework understanding. It must be fair and consistent with principles on all core issues outlined in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including land for peace — the road map and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Palestinians must be able to realize their legitimate aspirations to statehood, self-determination, dignity and freedom, including an end to the occupation that began in 1967, with a just solution to the plight of refugees and a resolution of the status of Jerusalem. Israelis must be able to live in peace and security within recognized borders, paving the way for their increasing integration in a stable and secure region.

The realization of the Arab Peace Initiative will yield socioeconomic, trade, and security benefits for all the peoples of the Middle East. For Palestinians, a comprehensive peace settlement holds the promise of becoming a fully recognized Member State of equal standing. There is no substitute for negotiations to achieve this end. Only then can the United Nations relationship with Palestine be truly transformed so as to fully implement and complete the Palestinian statebuilding agenda.

For Israel, too, only a negotiated solution will bring security and recognition in the region and beyond. Israel would be in a position to reap the full benefits of all forms of cooperation within the United Nations system. The United Nations and its Members would, in turn, greatly benefit from what Israel has to offer. I do not underestimate the difficulties, but the risks of inaction or surrender are far greater. We face possibly the last attempt to salvage the two-State solution. Quite simply, this is too important to fail.

My message to President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu is clear. If they are prepared to take the bold decisions required, I will push ahead on the positive agenda of peace dividends for both sides and ensure that the United Nations works towards realizing the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples within the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement. We must make the most of the prospect that Secretary Kerry has unlocked in order to see the creation of two States living side by side in peace and security that their peoples so desperately desire and deserve.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement. I appreciate his commitment and diplomatic activities. In the light of ongoing events, I understand that he will now have to leave the Chamber. I therefore wish him every success in his good offices today.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, for presiding over this meeting, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. I reaffirm the State of Palestine's gratitude for the principled efforts they have respectively and consistently exerted for peace and a just solution to the question of Palestine.

It is with immense pride that we see Jordan assume the presidency of the Security Council, and we convey our congratulations and wishes for success during its tenure. Likewise, we extend sincerest congratulations to the other new non-permanent members — Chad, Chile, Lithuania and Nigeria — confident in their adherence to the Charter and abilities to fulfil the serious responsibilities of this organ, including vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the goal of a just, comprehensive solution, which is a matter central to international peace and security.

On this occasion, we also express congratulations to the outgoing members of the Council — Azerbaijan, Guatemala, Morocco, Pakistan and Togo — on the completion of their tenure, and reaffirm our appreciation for the principled positions they have taken regarding Palestine during the Council's deliberations over the past two years. I also welcome the ministers who are among us today to participate in this deliberation.

Today, 20 January, is being observed in the United States in commemoration of the life of the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. Mr. King's wisdom inspired and transformed a generation, changed the course of history, and continues to inspire today. We recall today his declaration that

> "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly".

This principle lies at the heart of the United Nations aim to promote peace, security, human rights, development and dignity for all peoples. It is a principle acutely applicable to the injustice that continues to be borne by the Palestinian people — an injustice that has harmed our people, our region and global aspirations to peace, security and friendly relations among nations.

This is why the Palestine question has remained on the United Nations agenda for nearly seven decades. That is why the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations until the question is justly resolved. That is also why the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is annually observed on 29 November. And it is why the Assembly rightly proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The grave impact of this conflict — and, conversely, the multitude of benefits that a peaceful solution would have for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the Middle East and the international community as a whole — are facts widely recognized. That was recently echoed by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, who continues to expend tireless efforts, along with the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, the Quartet members — the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — and many countries from all over the globe in support of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and a peaceful settlement. Secretary Kerry has stated that

> "[t]he stakes here are much bigger than just Israel and Palestine. This is a conflict that is felt around the world. It is a conflict that has implications with every leader I have met anywhere in the world as Secretary of State or a Senator.
>
> "And President Obama is determined that the United States of America and his Administration will do everything in our power to exhaust the possibilities of finding that peace."

We recognize and commend that serious engagement by the international community, and we urge that this support be translated into intensified efforts for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace during this year. As negotiations are ongoing between Palestine and Israel, the international community and the Council have clear responsibilities and cannot remain on the sidelines. For decades, time, energy and resources have been heavily invested towards the realization of a two-State solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Now is the time to follow-through on that investment with political will and courage.

The long-standing consensus on the parameters of the solution must be reaffirmed, not set aside — completely ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders; and ensuring a just solution to the Palestine refugee problem based on the relevant resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The Security Council has a duty to ensure respect for its resolutions, which form the backbone of a fair and sustainable solution. The welcomed international pledges to support and ensure the implementation of a future peace agreement are surely based on the premise that this will be a lasting peace, not one that does not survive as more than ink on paper. That requires respect for the principles of a just solution of all core issues — refugees, Jerusalem, borders, settlements, security, water and prisoners. It is vital that the international community stand by those principles and persuade Israel, the occupying Power, to respect them. That is what will facilitate a permanent agreement and guarantee its viability. And, in the immediate present, that is what will foster an environment conducive to credible negotiations, real progress and the ultimate achievement of our collective goals.

On our part, the Palestinian Government and people are committed to peace and justice and are exhausting all efforts, conducting ourselves on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Council, the well-known parameters of the peace process and the agreements reached from 1993 onwards. We have responsibly participated in all stages, rounds and initiatives of the peace process for more than 20 years, including the current negotiations. And we are doing so on the basis of historic compromise and great sacrifice.

Yet the challenges we face on the ground are formidable. Mistrust, cynicism and despair are rising among the Palestinian people, as they continue to witness and endure illegal Israeli practices, which, far from bringing an end to the occupation, are further entrenching it, deforming the two-State solution, impeding socioeconomic development, inflicting vast human suffering and diminishing the hopes that the current peace process will lead to the realization of their freedom and rights.

Since the resumption of negotiations, Israel has announced plans to construct more than 7,600 settlement units, along with the construction under way on thousands more units throughout the occupied State of Palestine, including in and around East Jerusalem. Israel is also continuing the construction of its wall, destroying the contiguity of our land with such illegal colonization measures. Israel is almost daily continuing military raids in Palestinian areas, perpetuating the violent, destructive face of the occupation. Palestinian civilians continue to be killed and injured by the occupying forces. Settler terrorism is rampant. Provocations against Christian and Muslim holy sites, including at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque, in occupied East Jerusalem, persist, inflaming religious sentiments and high tensions.

Moreover, despite the welcomed release of long-term Palestinian prisoners, during 2013 alone at least 4,553 Palestinians, including children, were arrested or detained, adding to the ranks of the more than 5,000 Palestinians currently in Israeli jails. Also, Israel demolished at least 200 Palestinian homes in the past year, forcibly displacing hundreds of people. And the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to deepen the isolation, poverty and humanitarian hardships of our people, particularly our vulnerable refugees, whose subsistence has been almost totally reliant on the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

None of that engenders confidence in, or popular backing for, the negotiations. On the contrary, the continuation of Israel's illegal actions and provocative declarations further destabilize the situation and poison the atmosphere, obstructing progress and preventing peace from taking root on the ground and in the hearts and minds of our peoples.

Of course, making peace requires negotiations. But making peace also requires respect for international law and requires a change in mentality, behavior and discourse, consistent with the goals of the peace process and essential for preparing the public for new realities. The negotiations cannot be an objective in themselves or be used as cover to perpetuate the status quo.

There must be an immediate halt to Israel's settlement activities and its attempts to assert control over more territory, whether in Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley or elsewhere, as well as a halt to the arrest of Palestinian civilians, the demolition of homes and the forced displacement of Palestinian families, and all policies of collective punishment against our people, including in Gaza. That is imperative for creating trust and an appropriate environment for negotiating an end to the conflict, whereby the independent, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine and the State of Israel can coexist in peace and security and just solutions can be reached on all outstanding core issues.

A lasting solution must be founded on respect for international law and human rights. Peace and security cannot take root in the absence of those elements, as justice and rights are essential for peace to prevail anywhere. Therefore, in reaffirming Palestine's commitment to a peace based on two States, we reaffirm also our commitment to redressing the injustice borne by our people and fulfilling their national aspirations and rights, including the right to return and the right to self-determination.

The Palestinian leadership is acutely aware of this moment's significance and, despite the Israeli obstructions, is negotiating in good faith. If the opportunity for peace before us is lost, it will not be for a lack of effort by Palestine or by the international community, including the Arab States, whose historic Peace Initiative stands and is backed by intensive efforts, including the support of the 57 member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Should Israel choose to persist with colonization, annexation and oppression rather than choosing the path of peace, the response by the international community, including the Council, must be firm and based on the law and the global consensus on the conflict. The message to Israel must be clear: illegal actions entail consequences, and Israel will be held responsible should its actions lead to the collapse of peace efforts and the two-State solution.

Once again, before concluding, I must convey our grave concerns about the tragic situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria. As the conflict rages, our refugees, like other civilians in the country, continue to suffer death, injury, destruction and displacement, even including the starvation to death of children, women and men. The plight of thousands of Palestinian refugees trapped in the Yarmouk camp is shocking and inhumane. It is a humanitarian catastrophe. We urgently appeal for humanitarian access to the camp and to all civilians suffering in the conflict, in line with international law.

This crisis reconfirms the extreme vulnerability of the Palestinian refugees and the need for a just solution to their plight in the context of any peace agreement and of regional peace. We commend the efforts of UNRWA and other humanitarian organizations that are providing emergency aid to the Palestinian refugees in Syria and to those who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and other countries. As the Geneva Conference approaches, we appeal for the exertion of maximum efforts to ensure the protection of all civilians in Syria, including the Palestinian refugees, and to find a political solution to end this horrific conflict.

I thank you, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General and the members of the Council, including the Ministers of Luxembourg and the Republic of Korea, for participating in the meeting and for their attention to these important matters.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Before I begin, I want to express Israel's condolences on the death of United Nations personnel in Friday's terrorist attack in Kabul. There is no excuse for targeting civilians and United Nations workers.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Jordan on its election to the Security Council. We thank the Secretary-General, Foreign Minister Judeh, Mr. Jean Asselborn and Vice-Minister Cho Tae-yul for being here today. We also congratulate the new non-permanent members — Chad, Chile, Lithuania and Nigeria — on joining the Council. As ambassadors, they are privileged to represent their countries in the Chamber, and I wish them luck.

The Middle East is known as the cradle of civilization — the birth place of history's greatest empires and three world religions. The region was once admired for its inspiring art, striking architecture and significant innovations. Today, the world looks at the Middle East and sees a region shaken by violence. From the Arabian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, not a day goes by when we do not read about brutality and bloodshed, or new threats looming on the horizon. Amid that sea of hostility, Israel is an island of stability and democracy. It is a nation in which the majority governs, but the minority enjoys equal rights, a nation that embraces diversity and welcomes diverse opinions, a nation that leads the world in human rights and encourages women to be leaders.

Israel is proud of its democracy and yearns for peace with its neighbours and security on its borders.

The people of Israel are still mourning the loss of their legendary statesman and soldier, Ariel Sharon. He was a fearless leader who knew the heavy price of war and was willing to take bold steps for peace. The State of Israel is still willing to take courageous steps for peace and is committed to serious and meaningful negotiations with the Palestinians. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the United States, in particular Secretary Kerry for his tireless devotion to promoting peace in our region.

Twenty years ago, I recall watching King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin meet in the Arava Desert to sign the historic peace treaty between our two countries. At the signing, King Hussein said,

> "This is a peace with commitment. This is our gift to our peoples and the generations to come."

Fifteen years after his death, King Hussein's legacy of peace lives on. Israelis from across the political and religious spectrum still admire King Hussein's towering morality and his profound belief in the sanctity of life and the dignity of every human being. I and most Israelis will never forget the sight of King Hussein consoling the Israeli families whose children had been killed in a terrorist attack. After learning that a Jordanian soldier had murdered seven Israeli schoolgirls, King Hussein travelled to Israel to visit the homes of the bereaved families. One by one, he sat with the grieving parents, held their hands, offered words of condolence and hugged and kissed them. King Hussein told them,

> "I feel that if there is anything left in life, it will be to ensure that all the children enjoy the kind of peace and security that we never had in our times."

That is the legacy that his son, King Abdullah, proudly continues today.

Contrast that picture with a picture from just a few weeks ago. In December, Israel once again made the heartbreaking decision to release convicted Palestinian terrorists in an effort to advance the peace process. The released terrorists were given a heroes' welcome by the Palestinians and embraced by President Abbas. Murderers were met with fireworks and festivities and showered with candies and congratulations. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is rewarding terrorists with tens of thousands of dollars. The motto of the PA's pension plan seems to be "the more you slay, the more we pay." Is that coexistence? Is that tolerance? Is that mutual respect? Grieving Israelis watched as Palestinians celebrated men like Abu Harbish, who threw a firebomb at a bus, murdering 26-year-old Rachel Weiss and her three young children. To everyone in the Chamber I ask, How would you feel if you had to watch your family's murderers being celebrated? Would you call into question the so-called peaceful intentions of your neighbours? President Abbas could learn a great deal from King Hussein of Jordan about demonstrating his commitment to making peace.

Since peace talks began in July, hundreds of examples of Palestinian incitement against Israelis and Jews have occurred. From cradles to kindergartens and from schools to soccer stadiums, Palestinian children are besieged by messages of hate. They are born in hospitals named after violent Palestinian groups, attend schools named after terrorists and are taught from textbooks that equate Zionism with racism. In their free time, Palestinian children play on sports teams named after murderers and watch television programmes that teach that Jews are "our enemies and should be killed."

Rather than condemning that incitement, the Palestinian Authority is amplifying the messages of intolerance. President Abbas' Fatah party regularly displays maps that erase Israel. In one map, for example, the Palestinian flag flies over the entire geographic area of the State of Israel. This map extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River and is entitled "Palestine". In a speech on Christmas day, President Abbas declared that Jesus was a "Palestinian messenger" and suggested that Israel was to blame for the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land. That is a blatant attempt to rewrite history and erase any connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Today we are witnessing a mass exodus of Christians from the Palestinian territories and the Arab world because of the constant persecution and discrimination that they face by the Arab States. Abbas's made-up maps and mythical accounts could join the fables of the book *The Thousand and One Nights.*

We have already lost an entire generation to incitement. How many more children will grow up being taught hatred instead of peace, violence instead of tolerance, and martyrdom instead of mutual understanding? The international community must finally confront Palestinian leaders and publically demand an end to incitement.

The glorification of terrorists, combined with unrelenting messages of hatred, are having deadly consequences. In 2013, there were 1,500 attacks against Israelis, 700 of which occurred after peace negotiations had begun in July. In recent months there has been a sharp increase in terrorist attacks, including the murder of five Israelis. Just last month, a Palestinian sniper murdered 20-year-old Saleh Abu Latif, an Israeli Bedouin civilian. Two days later, a bomb exploded on a civilian bus in a suburb just outside Tel Aviv. Had it not been for the quick thinking of the bus driver and an alert passenger, dozens of people would have been killed. A successful attack could have had disastrous consequences for the peace talks.

In the face of the violence and bloodshed, we have yet to hear President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority utter a single word denouncing those attacks. They even remained silent when it was revealed that one of the bus bombers was, surprisingly, a member of the Palestinian police force. While most police forces have officers that uproot terrorism, that police officer was busy planting bombs.

The Palestinian leadership has yet to learn that real peace requires real commitment. You cannot condemn terrorism to international media and congratulate terrorists on Palestinian media. You cannot victimize others and then insist that you are the victim. And you cannot use this forum to spread destructive messages and then expect constructive results.

How many times have we heard that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the major conflict in the Middle East, and that if we solve that conflict we will solve all of the conflicts in the Middle East? Some in this Chamber have even repeated that fiction. Really? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the major conflict in the Middle East? Wow. People who say that need an eye doctor to help them to see clearly — beginning, maybe, with the ophthalmologist from Damascus, Bashar al-Assad, who is butchering his people every day. I am sure that is really connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Shiites fighting Sunnis fighting Alawites; extremist groups battling one another in Libya, Yemen and Tunisia; Al-Qaida forces overrunning major cities in Iraq — all of that is, of course, caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is a revelation. The truth is that Israel is an island of stability in a sea of tyranny.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose legacy is being celebrated today, once described Israel as

> "one of the great outposts of democracy in the world and a marvellous example of what can be done — how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security, and that security must be a reality".

I think it should be obvious that the violence and instability afflicting the Middle East have nothing to do with Israel. We must solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on its own merits because it is important for us. Solving the conflict is not a prescription for curing the epidemic of violence plaguing the Middle East. Despite what is constantly heard, the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has never been about borders or settlements. The major obstacle to peace remains the refusal of the Palestinian leaders to accept the Jewish State in any border. We will never hear President Abbas or any Palestinian leader utter the phrase "two States for two peoples".

Let me understand that. The Palestinians call for an independent Palestinian State, but want millions of their people to flood the Jewish State. It will never happen. It is a complete non-starter. Many in this Chamber are very vocal in telling Israel what to do, but begin to stutter, mumble and fall silent when it comes to telling the Palestinians what they must do. Each and every one present here must tell the Palestinians that there will never be peace as long as they refuse to recognize Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people and insist on a so-called right of return.

Despite what many believe, Israel dedicates a great deal of its energy and resources to assisting the Palestinian people. Today, more than 100,000 Palestinians earn their living in Israel and their income constitutes more than 10 per cent of the Palestinian gross domestic product. Israel helps generate solutions to energize the Palestinian economy. We transfer millions of dollars in electricity, water and natural gas to power Palestinian homes, schools and hospitals. When a giant storm struck last month, Israel delivered humanitarian aid and water pumps and facilitated the passage of fuel and cooking gas to Palestinians in need.

Yet for every truckload in the name of coexistence, we seem to be feeding a Palestinian opposition that challenges our very existence. It is time for Palestinians leaders to lead; it is time for them to set a course towards coexistence; and it is time for them to build the Palestinian people up, rather than to tear Israel down.

The Middle East is plagued by a reign of tyrants and a drought in leadership. Millions of people have taken to the streets demanding better lives, better economies and greater opportunities. The first peaceful protests in the region were in the streets of Tehran, where the Government brutalizes it citizens and throws innocent people into jail. Many in the international community believed that the new Iranian President would set a new precedent. It has been almost six months since President Rouhani took office, and Iran is still persecuting minorities, imprisoning journalists and targeting political adversaries. The Iranian Government has executed more of its citizens, per capita, than any other Government. Last year alone, the regime executed almost 600 people, including 367 since President Rouhani took office in August.

Iran does not confine its violence and extremism to its own borders. From Buenos Aires to Burgas, Iran is the world's primary sponsor of terror. Just this month, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif paid tribute, on behalf of the Islamic Republic, at the grave of one of Hizbullah's most notorious murderers. Rather than cleaning house, the new President believes that he can sweep Iran's atrocities under the Persian rug by introducing United Nations resolutions that condemn violence and extremism. Iran's so-called WAVE resolution, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism" (resolution 68/127), may have made a splash at the United Nations, but messages of intolerance and violence continue to trickle down from the top.

Behind Iran's smiling façade, President Rouhani and Ayatollah Khamenei continue to preach hatred and provoke hostility. Ayatollah Khamenei recently appeared on State television and delegitimized Israel, using disgusting profanity that does not bear repeating. The ink is barely dry on the interim nuclear agreement and Iran is already showing its true colours. It is a regime that crosses red lines, produces yellow cake and beats its citizens black and blue. Meanwhile, some in the international community are willing to serve Iran its yellow cake on a silver platter. Permitting Iran to keep its enrichment capabilities today means that Iran will retain its ability to break out and build a nuclear bomb tomorrow.

Violence is encoded in the Iranian regime's DNA. It does not take a crime-scene investigator to see Iran's fingerprints on the violence erupting in parts of the Middle East.

In the Gaza Strip, Iran backs the Hamas terrorist organization, which uses Palestinian schools, hospitals and mosques to launch rockets at Israeli citizens. We are barely three weeks into the new year, and Hamas has already launched 17 rockets at Israel, attacks that have closed schools and kept tens of thousands of children in southern Israel at home.

The international community has yet to find the time to utter even a single word of condemnation of those attacks, attacks that could derail the peace process. It has also yet to condemn Hamas for deliberately exploiting children. Schools in Gaza have become the training ground for the next generation of terrorists. Last week, Hamas graduated 13,000 students from paramilitary camps geared at training children to fight Israel.

In Lebanon, Iran has helped Hizbullah hijack the Lebanese State and transform it into an outpost for terror. For years, Hizbullah insisted that it needed a private army to defend Lebanon against, of course, Israel. Today, that army has sent 2,000 fighters to butcher the Syrian people and shoot rockets into Israel.

Hizbullah has positioned 60,000 missiles and rockets in the heart of southern Lebanon's civilian population. General Hajizadeh, a senior commander of the Aero-Space Forces of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, recently boasted that Hizbullah had improved its missile capabilities and could now hit and destroy any target in Israel.

Hizbullah intentionally hides those missiles in the basements of homes, in the playgrounds of schools and in the back rooms of hospitals. In doing so, Hizbullah is committing a double war crime: first, by using Lebanese civilians as human shields and, secondly, by targeting Israeli citizens.

The Government of Lebanon cannot continue to ignore what is happening in southern Lebanon, and it can no longer ignore its international obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). Throughout December, armed terrorists fired shots across the Blue Line into northern Israel. In one incident, a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces shot Israeli soldier Shlomi Cohen in a ruthless and unprovoked attack.

It is time for the Council to hold accountable all those who arm, train and harbour terrorists. It is time to speak out against those who callously disregard human life. As we have seen in Syria, the failure to do so has disastrous consequences.

The war in Syria is approaching its fourth year, and the death toll continues to climb. The Syrian

Government has resorted to new depths of brutality by dropping barrel bombs packed with explosives, nails and other shrapnel on markets and hospitals. In just a few days, more than 700 people have been killed and over 3,000 injured.

The State of Israel and the Jewish people are deeply troubled by the suffering of the Syrian people and are reaching out to help them. While some in the region are aiding the murderous Al-Assad regime, Israel is providing medical aid.

Sunnis, Alawites and Shiites are running to Israel, the so-called enemy, because they know that Israel will treat anyone without prejudice and regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender. We will continue to lend humanitarian assistance to the victims with open arms and an open heart.

Today, the Middle East stands at a critical juncture. There are two roads before us. The first is the future offered by Iran and Syria, a future of more extremism and greater violence. The second is the road towards equality, reform and stability.

Study after study has shown that there is a clear connection between advancing peace and advancing equal rights. When a woman receives an education, her children are healthier and more likely to get an education. When a woman generates her own income, she reinvests 90 per cent in her family and community. But women can help drive a nation's economy only if they are allowed onto the driver's seat.

As we begin the new year, the international community must call upon Arab leaders to choose the path of progress and abandon the road of repression. Tell them that tyranny will fail, tell them that peace is built on tolerance, and tell them that every man and every woman is entitled to equal rights and equal opportunities.

As Winston Churchill said, "All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom ... honour ... hope". The international community must stand on the side of human rights and human dignity. We must speak up and speak out so that the people of the Middle East can finally enjoy freedom, honour and hope.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign and Expatriate Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I am honoured to preside over today's meeting of the Security Council on the item "The situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

First, I would like to take the opportunity to express the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's appreciation for the States Members of the United Nations for the confidence they have shown my country by electing it, almost unanimously, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 2014-2015 term. We assure the Council that, God willing, we will prove that we are worthy of that confidence, by working with a spirit of cooperation and harmony with other members of the Security Council, entrusted with the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security on behalf of the international community.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, has a singular record of accomplishment, for which the entire international community has expressed appreciation. It is a record of relentless and fruitful efforts to promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations: achieving global harmony, peace, justice, security and stability. Jordan has also made remarkable contributions, distinguished by both quality and quantity, to United Nations peacekeeping operations in many regions of the world. I can assure the Council today that we will continue to honour that outstanding track record and will work diligently, with a positive spirit, to build on those achievements.

Unfortunately, the Middle East region continues to be gripped by chronic tensions with repercussions and ramifications that threaten international peace and security. That painful continuing reality has imposed on the Council agenda the tradition of regularly convening a special meeting on the Middle East, because the situation in the region is a constant source of concern owing to its direct impact on world peace.

We have no doubt that the continued absence of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israel is the source of most tensions in the Middle East. Hence the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace would give rise to dynamics that would lead to the elimination of other tensions in the region. The key to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace lies in the implementation of the two-State solution, with an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State established within the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security and within secure borders with all countries in the region, including Israel. Such a solution should be in line with the relevant terms of reference adopted in this regard, including the numerous resolutions adopted by the Council, such as resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), in addition to the Arab Peace Initiative, whose importance has been repeatedly acknowledged by the Council.

Based on that conviction, we support the ongoing, much-appreciated efforts led by the United States and undertaken personally by its Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, aimed at reaching a Palestinian-Israeli agreement that adopts the two-State solution and addresses all core issues, namely, refugees, Jerusalem, security, borders, water and settlements, in accordance with the aforementioned international terms of reference and resolutions of international legitimacy. We also deeply appreciate the efforts being made by Secretary Kerry to ensure that an agreement is reached by the bodies directly concerned and not by proxy. We have consistently stressed this issue.

In that context, I deem it imperative to stress that we in Jordan believe that the implementation of the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State within the June 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, constitute a higher interest for Jordan. In fact, all of the core issues directly affect higher, factual Jordanian interests. We are the world's largest host of Palestinian refugees, and most of the refugees on our territory are Jordanian citizens in addition to their status as refugees. The protection and restoration of their legitimate rights, as recognized by the international terms of reference pertaining to the peace process, lies at the heart of our responsibilities.

As a host country, we, in turn, have rights owing to the burdens we have shouldered. Regarding East Jerusalem, His Majesty King Abdullah II is ensuring the maintenance and protection of Christian and Islamic holy sites there, as part of the historical Hashemite custodianship of East Jerusalem. We will continue to play that role and to address all Israeli violations, which continue in defiance of several resolutions issued by the Security Council that stipulate that all Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem are null and void and should be halted immediately, and that the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem must end. Moreover, the world rejects Israel's settlement activity, which is illegal and continues even as we speak. In addition, the issues of security, borders and water directly affect the security of Jordan and its interests.

Accordingly — and although we are not a party to the negotiating process yet are a main party in the context of the process as a whole — let me stress that all agreements on the core issues should take into full account and, indeed, meet Jordan's vital and higher interests. Our unyielding commitment to achieving peace is based on our firm conviction that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would lead to an end to the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, which would, in turn, result in the elimination of many other sources of tension in the region. I cannot fail to point to the tragic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and urge the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in that regard.

The tragic, bloody crisis in Syria continues to rage. This bloodshed must stop immediately. Syria must work to end the crisis there, especially since it has spilled over beyond Syrian borders and now threatens regional and international stability. That threat is associated not only with displacement and an influx of refugees into neighbouring countries, but also with the unrestrained flow of people and weapons into Syria's neighbours. That has become an alarming phenomenon that poses a real security threat to some of those countries, the entire region and even beyond, as international peace and security are at stake. We in Jordan are convinced that a political solution is the only way to end this tragedy.

The upcoming international conference to be held in Montreux, Switzerland, is an opportunity that should not be wasted to put this political solution on the right track through the cessation of hostilities. Such a political solution must meet the aspirations of the Syrian people, for which so much blood has already been shed. The envisioned political transition should immediately lead, through a consensus among all parties, to the establishment of an inclusive executive transitional body representing the entire Syrian spectrum. It should have full authority and act immediately to restore social cohesion in Syria, with complete jurisdiction over the entire territory of the country, in a manner that ensures Syria's territorial integrity and political independence. Such a body should also have full control and sovereignty over Syria's weapons arsenals, pave the way for a pluralistic and democratic political system, and work to restore security and stability in order to encourage the return of internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring countries, with Jordan at the forefront. As the Council is aware, we are currently hosting about 1.3 million Syrian citizens, including nearly 600,000 who have been refugees in Jordan since the outbreak of the crisis three years ago. We are sharing with those brothers and sisters our already limited resources, with the cost of their hosting estimated at $1.7 billion for 2013. We anticipate the cost to reach $2.8 billion in 2014.

We call upon the international community to help us meet the challenge to which we have risen on behalf of humankind. We have previously extended an invitation to the Council to visit the camps so as to get a close look at the situation on the ground. Moreover, I wish to express our gratitude to the State of Kuwait and to the Secretary-General for hosting the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria. It could be useful for the Security Council to adopt the results of the aforementioned international conference when they are achieved. It would also be useful if it were to adopt a resolution that makes it mandatory for all parties to implement those results. Let me take this opportunity to express our appreciation for all who have made such great efforts to facilitate the holding of this important conference, particularly several States members of the Security Council, namely the initiating countries, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, and others that have played an important role in that regard.

There is no doubt that the unending conflict in the Middle East and the unusual circumstances in some countries of the region are all interlinked because they have been unfolding in a time of war. Such circumstances have produced internal tensions in some countries in our region that in turn have led to practices that have fuelled sectarian, ethnic and religious polarization, opened the door wide to interference by external powers, incited parties against each other and interfered in the internal affairs of some countries in the region, driven by their desire for hegemony and expansion. The result has been a deepened state of polarization that is spilling over into other countries. It poses a real threat to regional and international peace and stability. It is therefore the duty of all to firmly confront violence, extremism and all forms of terrorism, as well as religious, ethnic and sectarian polarization, and to tirelessly work to eliminate the root causes of phenomena that threaten internal and international stability.

Nevertheless, addressing the wave of extremism, sectarian and religious tension and incitement in the region is a challenge to regional security and stability, as its effects can be seen to be spilling over into our neighbouring countries, not just in Syria. It requires us to make concerted efforts to counter such ideas. Building on the Amman Message and the "A Common Word" initiative, and under the guidance of His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, we in Jordan have embarked on an effort to address those phenomena.

In the context of that effort, an Islamic conference was convened in Amman last summer, at which participants voiced their complete rejection of the use of and incitement to sectarian conflict. It was stressed at the conference that the freedom of opinion and belief and the sanctity of human blood were sacred. The conference rejected the apostatizing approach and the use of such practices in political conflict. The conference was followed by another, entitled "Challenges facing Christian Arabs", at which His Majesty stressed that

> "[w]e believe that the protection of the rights of Christians is a duty rather than a favour. Arab Christians have played a key role in building Arab societies and defending the just causes of our Nation [and that] "[w]e support every effort to preserve the historical Arab Christian identity and safeguard the right to worship freely, based on the principle in both the Christian and Islamic faiths that emphasizes the love of God and of neighbour, as embodied in the 'A Common Word' initiative".

Finally, I thank the Council again and reiterate that Jordan, as the world has always known it to do, will continue to work hard and earnestly for the development of cooperation and cordial relations between the countries of the world and its peoples. It will pursue its approach and mission to enhance international security and peace and counter isolationism, despair and hatred. Jordan will tirelessly work to promote harmony and respect among all nations and peoples, cultures and civilizations. That will bring us together under the umbrella of humanity, which is an ideal that will yield the greatest benefits to all.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the members of the Council.

Mr. Asselborn (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to congratulate Jordan on its election to the Security Council, and on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month, at a particularly important juncture for the Middle East. Your presence among us, Mr. President, highlights the significance of this open debate, at the beginning of a crucial week for efforts to end the conflict in Syria, the impact of which represents a very heavy burden for your country and the other neighbouring countries of Syria, above all for Lebanon.

I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements.

First, I would like to address the Middle East peace process. There is today a historic opportunity to build peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The announcement six months ago of the resumption of negotiations was an important first step. It is now our shared responsibility to support the efforts of the United States and the indefatigable commitment of Secretary of State John Kerry in order to help the parties take the difficult yet indispensable decisions to realize the vision of the long-term interests of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. To succeed, the negotiations process requires a favourable political environment and measures that strengthen mutual trust. Some steps still need to be taken. Unilateral acts that feed the logic of distrust must cease.

The year 2013 ended on a positive note, with Israel's freeing of a third group of 26 Palestinian prisoners. However, we remain deeply worried about the pursuit of the Israeli settlement policy, which is illegal under international law and represents a real threat to peace and goes against the principle of good faith negotiations. Nobody will believe that the efforts to achieve peace can succeed if settlement activities continue, if the Gaza blockade persists, if the separation wall keeps on grabbing Palestinian land, and if the destruction of Palestinian infrastructures intensifies.

We are also highly worried by the continuing rocket attacks launched by certain Palestinian factions from the Gaza strip against Israeli territory. Nothing justifies that blind and unacceptable recourse to violence, which clearly does not serve the Palestinian cause. We must end every kind of provocation and respect the borders of the Palestinian people and the security of the Israeli population; both are closely intertwined.

The American initiative is probably the last chance to end the occupation, implement the two-State solution based on the borders of 1967 and create a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. We must take advantage of this opportunity, and Luxembourg will continue to engage with its European Union partners to contribute to the ongoing efforts, in close cooperation with key stakeholders, the Quartet and the countries of the region.

The Secretary-General has just recalled the objective of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which starts the day after tomorrow in Montreux — the cessation of hostilities, an end to all violence and the beginning of a political settlement on the basis of the full and comprehensive implementation of the 30 June 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). That must lead to the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers and formed on the basis of mutual consent. We welcome the decision taken on 18 January by the Syrian National Coalition to attend the second Geneva Conference. I can only encourage the Syrian National Coalition to maintain the courageous position it has taken. I also call on Iran to commit to playing a constructive role to put an end to the Syrian conflict by explicitly signing onto the implementation of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 and the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers, as called for in the Secretary-General's letter of invitation. The authorities in Damascus must now allow the Syrian people to take their destiny into their own hands, and they must stop rejecting the principles of a political transition, which were agreed in the Geneva communiqué.

The needs and rights of all Syrians must be taken into account — in particular those of the Syrian women, who, together with the children, have borne the brunt of the repression since it started. With others, Luxembourg is working towards the full participation of women in the political transition process in Syria, in accordance with resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2122 (2013). In order for the negotiations process to lead to lasting peace, it is indeed important that, from the beginning, women are empowered to make their voices heard and express their point of view, share their experiences, their concerns and their specific needs.

The humanitarian and security challenges can be resolved only through a negotiated political settlement of the crisis. Faced with the spiral of violence that threatens the region, however, we cannot wait for the conclusion of a future political process, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the long list of war crimes and crimes against humanity, which bring Syria each day closer to its destruction. Given the bombing of hospitals and schools, the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and medical and health-care workers, the targeting of pharmacies, the use of starvation as a weapon of war to pressure the people of Ghouta, the sieges and massacres, and the use of chemical weapons, Scud missiles and barrel bombs, nothing seems to be off-limits any more in Syria and a climate of total impunity prevails. In the face of those horrors, I want to repeat here what we have been saying for a year: the Council must refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic proportions. We know this. More than 9 million Syrians, about half the population of the country, are in desperate need of emergency aid, in particular those who are trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Confronted with that crisis, the world is mobilizing: more than $2.4 billion in assistance was pledged at the second conference held in Kuwait City on 15 January. I personally participated in that conference to announce a new contribution of Luxembourg representing an increase of more than 60 per cent compared to our pledge of 2013.

Unfortunately, the pledged aid will not be able to achieve its aim if there is no progress in terms of humanitarian access on the ground. Without immediate, safe and unhindered access, the survival of half the Syrian population is at stake. The same goes for the Palestinians trapped in Yarmouk. The Syrian people cannot be content with a few localized and fragile ceasefires, or the liberation of a few political prisoners. It cannot be content with concessions made here and there by the authorities in Damascus when it is in their strategic or political interest. The authorities must respect their obligations and they must implement the demands of the Council. Without significant progress in terms of access, the Council will need, in our opinion, to assume its responsibilities and adopt a humanitarian resolution.

I shall conclude my statement by addressing the situation in Lebanon. In the past months, the number of deadly attacks have multiplied. I will mention only the attack in Beirut on 27 December 2013, which cost the life of former Minister Mohamad Chatah, a man of dialogue. That is a very worrying sign of the growing impact of the Syrian conflict on the security and stability of Lebanon. The very clear message sent by the Council in its presidential statement of 10 July 2013 (S/PRST/2013/9) and in the numerous press statements that followed remains more than ever valid today. That message calls on all those who disregard the Baabda Declaration to put an end to their actions, which threaten the model of unity in diversity that is Lebanon.

In that regard, I would like to reiterate our support to Lebanon, its institutions and its policy of dissociation. Finally, I welcome the opening, on 16 January, before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of the trial in absentia of four members of Hizbullah accused of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. I hope that the trial will mark the beginning of the end of impunity for the crimes committed in Lebanon.

Mr. Cho Tae-yul (Republic of Korea): First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your devoted efforts in organizing today's open debate. Let me also extend my sincere thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive briefing.

During the final weeks of 2013 and the beginning of the new year, critical developments have transpired in the Middle East at a steady pace. Some are positive, giving us cause for cautious optimism, while others present uncertainties and concerns. The great Syrian poet Adonis once wrote, "To whom do these distances belong that separated us and that now bind us?" Indeed, disagreements and differences among us are the very origin of the challenges we face. At the same time, such differences also highlight our interconnectedness and push us towards a renewed resolve to address the problems before us.

We welcome the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to be convened later this week. As a participant, the Republic of Korea will play its due part in order to achieve meaningful progress. We would like to commend the efforts made by all parties who made the conference possible.

In nearly three years of fighting, the conflict has resulted in more than 120,000 deaths, 2.3 million refugees and 6.5 million internally displaced persons. Comprehensive and action-oriented peace talks are now an absolute necessity, and an unconditional ceasefire and expanded humanitarian access are urgently needed.

From now on, every second is of infinite value, and we must seize the moment to stop further human suffering. Recently, there has been a brutal campaign waged by the Syrian Government with the use of heavy weapons, such as barrel bombs, in densely populated areas. We condemn such attacks and urge the Syrian Government to halt that indiscriminate killing. Clashes between predominantly foreign Al-Qaida-affiliated groups and local opposition forces are also a matter of deep concern. We are deeply troubled by the reports of massacres, mass graves and forced religious conversions.

On the other side of recent developments, we welcome the continued progress made in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). We commend the joint efforts by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons, even in the face of an incredibly challenging environment. Together with the outcome of the humanitarian aid donor conference held in Kuwait last week, those are good signs that our joint efforts are making progress. I sincerely hope that such efforts will provide the basis for the success of the second Geneva Conference.

Another worrying example of the spillover from the Syrian conflict is the recent attacks against the city of Fallujah in Iraq, which were perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the increased human losses and the worsening humanitarian situation in that area. We encourage the Iraqi Government to continue its close cooperation with local leaders to fight back the extremist militia. We hope that Iraq will achieve lasting peace and stability through an inclusive political process and reconciliation.

The escalating violence in Lebanon is also of serious concern to many of us in the Chamber. The Republic of Korea strongly condemns the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Beirut and Hermel. The attack on the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, the assassination of the former Minister Mohamad Chatah and the targeted attacks on civilians in south Beirut are all a reflection of the continued spillover from the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. The Korean Government urges all parties in Lebanon to respect the disassociation policy and to refrain from any involvement in the Syrian crisis, in accordance with their commitments as set out in the Baabda Declaration.

The Republic of Korea also extends its support to the United Nations-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which convened last week in The Hague. We hope that the perpetrators of the 2005 terrorist attack that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others will be brought to justice. We view the Special Tribunal as a historic opportunity to combat impunity in Lebanon.

It is an indisputable fact of life that the prompt and long-overdue settlement of the Middle East peace process constitutes a foundation for peace and stability in the entire Middle East region. In that regard, the Korean Government commends Israel and Palestine for remaining committed to peace negotiations, and notes with appreciation the continued efforts of the United States Government to make progress in the right direction. We believe that working towards an agreed framework that establishes concrete guidelines to deal with the core issues will lead to the much-needed breakthrough in the ongoing peace talks.

At the same time, we sincerely hope that the continued settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian buildings will come to an end. We condemn the continued rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza, which threaten the fragile peace. It is also important that security in the West Bank improve in order to foster the necessary confidence and enable the negotiations to move forward.

We all know that, in today's ever interconnected world, no single country can enjoy peace and stability in separation from the rest of the world. That is why the international community must work together in dealing with regional conflicts. The Republic of Korea would therefore like to emphasize the importance of sustained efforts to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. In that regard, it is imperative that the Security Council, which bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, play its due role, serving to forge a united voice.

The President: I would like to say that, as we mark Martin Luther King Jr. Day today, Dr. King's message of peace, equality, freedom and justice resonates across the globe to this very day.

Ms. Power (United States of America): The Middle East has often been prey to the turbulence of conflicting forces, but rarely have we seen efforts towards peace and the staggering human costs of war so vividly and so simultaneously evident. That contrast is especially striking in Syria, where diplomatic initiatives have intensified against the backdrop of an ever-more brutal civil war.

The best way to begin to bring that war to an end is through the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled to start in Switzerland on Wednesday. My Government has been working closely with the international community and the Syrian opposition coalition to prepare for that Conference. We welcome the coalition's courageous decision this past weekend to participate in the talks, the purpose of which is to ensure the implementation of the Geneva Action Group communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). That document calls for the establishment, based on mutual consent, of a transitional governing body with full executive authority, including over military and security entities. It is vital that all participants in the opening ministerial meeting and in subsequent talks support that core goal.

As of this morning, however, Iran has yet to demonstrate its willingness to subscribe to the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué, which is a minimum requirement for participation in the peace process.

The Syrian Government's recent and deadly bombing campaign, including the use of Scud missiles and barrel bombs in the Aleppo and Damascus suburbs, provides further demonstration of the Al-Assad regime's cruelty and of the fact that there is no military solution to the conflict. That is why we are so focused on a negotiated political transition of the type to be discussed in Geneva.

The urgency of diplomatic progress is highlighted by the deepening of the humanitarian crisis created by the war and by the Syrian Government's failure to implement the Council's presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15).

In recent days, the Syrian regime has seemingly agreed to improve humanitarian access to besieged areas, but we have not seen evidence of meaningful implementation on the ground. For months, communities, including Yarmouk, East Ghouta, Daraya, the Old City of Homs and Moadamiya, have been besieged and cut off from food and medical supplies. It is not just the case that food cannot get in; people — starving people, desperate people — cannot get out. On the very rare occasions that evacuations from besieged areas have been organized, the regime has taken inhabitants away to be screened. In many cases, the whereabouts of those individuals are unknown and remain unknown today.

East Ghouta is an egregious example of Syrian obstruction. It is an area where international chemical weapons inspectors were allowed access but where 160,000 civilians remain cut off from humanitarian aid. Pro-Al-Assad snipers regularly target residents attempting to travel through checkpoints. The Government has blockaded fuel supplies, and residents have electricity for only a couple of hours per day. A young child even died of carbon monoxide poisoning because his family had been compelled to burn firewood inside their house to keep warm. Let us be clear: if inspectors can obtain access to East Ghouta, so too should the providers of medicine and food.

Yarmouk provides another tragic example. It has been under constant siege since July 2013. Recent reports of more than a dozen malnutrition-related deaths among children and other Palestinian residents are horrifying and should shock the conscience of all of us. We received reports from the United Nations in recent days that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was finally able to carry in a small amount of food parcels — 200 parcels, which will feed 1,000 people for one month. There are 18,000 people in Yarmouk who are under siege, lacking food and medicine. It is devastating to imagine how starving people will divide up the food parcels. Humanitarian providers who managed to deliver those food parcels literally had to dodge sniper fire.

Although the regime is primarily responsible for denying humanitarian access, some opposition groups have also been culpable in such communities as Nubal, Zahra and Foua'a. That is unacceptable. The deliberate blocking or withholding of life-giving aid by any party cannot be justified and must stop now before more innocent people die.

The plight of Syrian civilians and refugees is heartbreaking and makes last week's conference in Kuwait all the more important. The United States pledged $380 million in new funds to help tackle the crisis, bringing our total commitment since the fighting began to more than $1.7 billion. We welcome the new pledges from other donor nations, as well as the international community's renewed commitment to assisting the Syrian people and the neighbouring countries that are providing a safe haven for refugees.

In the brief period before the second Geneva Conference, it is critical that we make concrete progress on humanitarian access issues. We must also do everything that we can to halt the violence. To that end, we call urgently on all parties to agree on local ceasefires and to move ahead with prisoner releases.

We commend your country, Jordan, Mr. President, for sheltering some 600,000 refugees, and we recognize the enormous economic and social toll the conflict has taken on your country. Jordan has opened its doors for an emergency situation, and we know that that is draining its domestic resources. The international community has an obligation to ensure that Jordan's generosity does not become an unsustainable burden on its population.

In Lebanon the situation has grown even more perilous, as the Syrian war has exacerbated the security, financial and social pressures faced by the nation's leaders. More than 1,600 Lebanese communities bear the burden of hosting more than 900,000 refugees from Syria. My Government continues to help Lebanon tackle its massive challenges via the recently established International Support Group for Lebanon. We urge other donors also to provide aid that is consistent with International Support Group priorities. A stable and united Lebanon with strong democratic institutions is in the best interests of the Lebanese people and of citizens throughout the Middle East. In that context, we encourage the formation of a new Cabinet to address the country's security, economic and humanitarian challenges and to meet its international obligations.

The Syrian civil war has contributed to rising sectarian violence and political friction inside Lebanon. As has been said, the assassination, on 27 December 2013, of the widely respected former finance minister Mohamad Chatah was an outrage. The 2 January suicide bombing in southern Beirut's Haret Hreik neighbourhood killed 5 people and wounded many more. Meanwhile, sporadic violence has continued for weeks in Tripoli and near the Syrian border.

In that respect, we note Saudi Arabia's commitment, announced last month, to provide generous amounts of additional aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). We will continue to partner closely with Lebanon's security services, which have a pivotal role to play in support of Lebanon's security and sovereignty. We condemn the violence, urge all parties to exercise restraint, and commend the LAF for its efforts to stem the violence. The Lebanese Government's policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict, as enshrined in the Baabda Declaration, must be upheld.

It is equally vital that all relevant Security Council resolutions be implemented, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), which call for the disbandment and disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. The United States strongly condemns the 29 December 2013 rocket attack that was launched from Lebanese territory into Israel.

Finally, we welcome the start of the trial before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of four persons charged with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others who were killed in the bombing. That trial is a positive step towards justice and away from the acceptance of impunity for political violence, and we commend the Lebanese Government and other donor countries for supporting the Tribunal.

Turning to the subject of Middle East peace, the United States is continuing its efforts to assist the Israelis and Palestinians in reaching a final status agreement that recognizes two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security. Secretary of State Kerry returned to the region earlier this month in support of a proposed framework that addresses all core issues. As the parties consider the difficult decisions ahead, the United States remains convinced that the benefits of peace for both sides can best be achieved through the kind of process in which we are presently engaged. Accordingly, the United States reiterates its view that all parties should refrain from actions that might undermine the atmosphere required for ongoing negotiations. Steps that diminish trust, such as continued settlement activity, only feed scepticism on both sides.

Further, we are deeply troubled by the escalation of violence leading to civilian casualties. We condemn rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel and the attempt to kill civilians by placing a bomb on a public bus in Tel Aviv. We are also seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and urge all parties to cooperate in expanding access for people, goods and humanitarian supplies.

The consistent support of peace efforts by key partners is essential. We particularly welcome the European Union's generous pledge last month to provide unprecedented political and economic support for Israel and the Palestinians in the context of a final status peace agreement. We are gratified as well by the decision of the League of Arab States, whose representatives met with Secretary Kerry in Paris on 12 January, to reaffirm its commitment to those negotiations.

Finally, on Iraq, I thank the Secretary-General for reporting on his recent visit and would like to commend the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for their efforts to ensure the delivery of aid to the people of Anbar province. The United States strongly condemns the attacks carried out by forces affiliated with Al-Qaida in Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq. Their brazen attempt at destabilization cannot be allowed to succeed. As the Council made clear in its recent statement,

> "no terrorist act can reverse the path towards peace, democracy and reconstruction in Iraq, which is supported by the people and the Government of Iraq and the international community" (*S/PRST/2014/1*).

In that spirit, we are encouraged by the cooperation being shown by Iraq's Government, its national security forces and local tribal leaders in trying to restore stability, resist terrorist aggression and ease the hardships faced by Iraqi civilians.

I, too, note that today is a national holiday in the United States. Martin Luther King Jr. taught the citizens of my country and people everywhere to pursue justice and the resolution of differences by peaceful means. In his words, "returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars". The wisdom in that warning is always and everywhere relevant, but never more so than now in the Middle East, where peace initiatives demand our support amid the anguish of continued conflict.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank you, Mr. President, for your presence here today. We acknowledge Jordan's efforts to promote a Middle East peace, and we thank Jordan for bearing such a difficult burden in sheltering so many of those who have fled the Syrian conflict. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

We all know that 2014 will be a critical year — maybe a decisive year — for the Middle East peace process. The final status negotiations under way offer the best chance for peace in the region, and Australia of course fully supports those negotiations towards a just and lasting two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. We appreciate United States Secretary of State Kerry's perseverance and the effective engagement of all parties in the negotiations. Great courage and statesmanship will be required in equal measure to achieve peace, and we offer our full support to Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas at this critical juncture in the negotiations. For this best chance to succeed, we call on both parties to avoid any provocative actions that would undermine confidence in the talks. Australia itself stands ready to assist in any way it can to support the negotiations.

At the same time, we remain deeply concerned at the growing impact of the Syrian conflict on peace and stability in the region. We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations to start a process this week that will hopefully lead to a political solution based on the principles agreed at the first Geneva conference in 2012. Australia has accepted the Secretary-General's invitation to participate. The goal of the the second Geneva Conference on Syria must remain the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, as agreed in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We urge the Syrian Government and the Syrian National Coalition to participate constructively, and countries with influence to lend their full support to the process. The Syrian parties should also heed the Secretary-General's insistence that their delegations to the Conference include broad and substantial representation of women.

We are concerned by the increasing presence in Syria of groups with links to Al-Qaida. Those organizations have no place in Syria's future, and existing Council sanctions against them must be implemented by all States.

The recent admission by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the situation on the ground in Syria is now so bad that it can no longer update its estimates of the conflict's death toll is a chilling fact. It is obvious that a political process that can bring an end to this conflict is desperately needed. The urgency of the humanitarian crisis was underscored last week by the discussions in Kuwait, where States met to discuss the unprecedented appeal by humanitarian agencies. We welcome the pledges that were made, and urge that they be swiftly honoured and coordinated closely with the United Nations.

We are also pleased to have been able to make our own contribution to the joint mission of the

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations and its vital work in removing all chemical weapons from Syria. We must not allow that work to be delayed, and Syria itself must meet its obligations to eliminate all elements of its chemical weapons programme.

Foreign Minister Asselborn has just described the terrible magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. We endorse his comments. It is imperative that humanitarian assistance reach people in need. We again call on the parties to the conflict to adhere immediately to the provisions of the Council's presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of October 2013 regarding access for humanitarian workers and supplies. We are especially concerned about the large numbers of civilians still trapped in besieged towns. All parties to the conflict must ensure that humanitarian supplies can get through, including through the development of urgent local ceasefires. Those States with influence with the parties should reinforce this message in accordance with the work plan agreed in the high-level group on humanitarian challenges in Syria convened by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

As we know, the conflict has had a hugely destabilizing impact on Syria's neighbours. One year ago, neighbouring countries were host to over half a million Syrian refugees. Today, the number is almost 2.5 million — more than 10 per cent of Syria's population. The Council must be conscious of the fact that Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq are all shouldering enormous burdens as part of the conflict. That underlines the need for continued efforts by the Council on Syria.

In Lebanon, the destabilizing effects of the conflict are all too apparent, given the recent spate of car bombings, including the assassination of the former Finance Minister and the attack on the Iranian Embassy. We commend the efforts of the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain security and urge all parties to adhere to President Sleiman's policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict. Lebanon's political parties need to work together and form a Government quickly, so that Lebanon's challenges can best be addressed.

In concluding, we condemn the violence perpetrated in western Iraq in recent weeks by the Al-Qaida-linked Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its associates. We must continue to support the ongoing anti-terrorist efforts of the Iraqi Government, together with tribal leaders, in combating that aggression. Resolving that threat will be important so as to ensure that there is no delay in the 30 April electoral timetable. Timely credible elections will help to facilitate an inclusive political dialogue in Iraq. Such an inclusive dialogue is essential. We encourage Iraq's various community leaders to continue to work together to achieve that and to resolve the country's challenges.

Mr. Estreme (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to express Argentina's satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, preside over this meeting of the Security Council at such a critical time for the Middle East. I would like to convey to you my country's thanks in particular for being here with us today.

I would like to talk about two issues: the Syrian crisis and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With regard to Syria, Argentina welcomes the progress made in the recent weeks and days, in particular the meeting of senior officials of the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Nations, which opened the way for the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria. As we are all aware, it is a historic opportunity to put an end to the conflict in Syria. The process that will begin there will not be easy. Given the extent of the hostility among the parties and the amount of violence and mutual distrust, reaching agreements will be an extremely difficult task. We appeal to all parties to avoid any action that could undermine the process of the Conference. In that context, we endorse the call by the Secretary-General for a ceasefire, allowing the United Nations to support peace talks between the Syrian Government and the anti-Government forces.

In order for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to be successful, the regional and international actors supporting both parties in the dispute must be fully convinced that only a political solution is possible. As we have said on other occasions, Argentina believes that peace in Syria depends, to a large extent, on what key regional or international actors do or fail to do. All those that have a decisive influence on the parties must play a role in support of the process, without which it will be difficult for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to succeed. We also appeal to all parties to commit to the negotiating process in order to put an end to a conflict that has now lasted for more than 33 months, caused great loss of life and threatens to destroy Syria.

In that context, allow me to say that we are greatly concerned about the activities of the rebel groups that maintain links with Al-Qaida, not only because of the serious terrorist threat but also owing to their effect on the rest of the region, which could become a serious threat to regional stability and international security. In addition, we reiterate that the continuing supply of weapons to both sides in the dispute has been instrumental to the increasing militarization of the conflict. We insist that the provision of arms to the parties must stop. There is no doubt that the weapons in Syria are being used to commit violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the progress made in implementing resolution 2118 (2013) with regard to chemical weapons. We in particular welcome the ongoing progress made in eliminating the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. That is an indication that the close cooperation between the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons continues to be fruitful and that the Syrian Government continues to cooperate with the United Nations Joint Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and its objectives and upholds its commitment to meet its obligations.

With regard to ending the second phase and for the next phase, the strong commitment and support of the international community, including the Security Council, are required. We reiterate that it is essential, in that regard, that those States with influence on the parties, in particular the opposition groups, use that influence to promote the success of the Mission and, in particular, to call for ensuring the safety and neutrality of the Mission and its staff.

We must also reiterate our concern about the loss of human lives as a result of the Syrian conflict. The vast majority of those lives have been lost owing to the use of conventional weapons by both the Government and the armed opposition. Argentina firmly condemns the deaths of an unacceptable number of civilians.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation of half of the Syrian people, who are in urgent need of help. In that regard, we welcome the results of the recent donor conference, held in Kuwait. The continuing impediments to access for humanitarian aid make the civilian population even more vulnerable and exacerbate their already distressing living conditions. We call on all parties to allow access to humanitarian aid in accordance with international law and, in particular, international humanitarian law.

Another distressing element of the Syrian conflict is the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and the serious humanitarian situation that those countries face as a result. I would like express our gratitude to the Government and people of Jordan for their commitment and their efforts to provide assistance and safety to those fleeing the conflict. Argentina is convinced that the war crimes, the crimes against humanity and the serious violations of human rights cannot remain unpunished. We therefore reiterate that the Security Council must consider referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Argentina views with cautious optimism the fact that the Palestinians and Israelis are continuing to participate in the negotiations on the peace process. However, progress is slow and extremely difficult. We believe that, in order to make greater progress, it is necessary to move forward on the basis of the long and broadly agreed principles, without questioning the parameters of the two-State solution enshrined in international law and supported by the vast majority of the international community. Two States on the basis of the 1967 borders, with the agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, the necessary security arrangements and a fair solution to the refugee issue should be the foundation for any negotiation.

Furthermore, although gestures have been made, such as the release of Palestinian prisoners prior to the Oslo Agreement, there continue to be other developments that are completely incompatible with the peace process, exacerbate the lack of trust and do not help towards creating favourable conditions for dialogue. Those include, in particular, the recent announcements of illegal settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, the approval by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs of the State of Israel of a bill for the annexation of the Jordan Valley, the marked increase in attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and the missile launches from the Gaza Strip and the resulting military responses, as well as the continual rhetoric of confrontation. We call on the parties to renew their commitment to the peace process and to abstain from all action that may undermine efforts to move forward in the pursuit of a lasting peace.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the coming months will be decisive in ending an occupation that has lasted more than half a century and violates international law. It also is morally reprehensible, politically unacceptable and strategically unviable.

Argentina wholeheartedly believes in the importance of the international community's meaningful assistance in the negotiations. The lack of progress or a new failure in that effort might seriously harm the two-State solution, with serious consequences. In that connection, we reiterate our belief that the Security Council must pronounce itself on the situations I have mentioned, take concrete steps to complement the negotiations and show the way towards a two-State solution — for example, by accepting Palestine's request to become a State Member of the United Nations, as a follow up to General Assembly resolution 67/19.

It is for the Council, in compliance with its obligations, to send out clear messages, and not to remain indifferent in the face of actions that undermine regional and international efforts to provide a solution to the conflict.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): I would like to thank you, Foreign Minister Judeh, for convening this meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his update on the situation in Middle East.

In Syria, the total destruction of the country's economic and social fabric, displacement and starvation, increasing fragmentation, sectarianism and the spread of extremism are the price of the Government's failure, three years ago, to respond to its people's peaceful demands for reforms. The effects of the war in Syria are felt throughout the region, with neighbouring countries struggling to accommodate the refugee flows, and Al-Qaida affiliates and other extremists using the crisis for their ends. The failure to put an end to the extraordinary human suffering and continuous massive violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Syria is deeply troubling. We note the ongoing efforts, under extremely challenging circumstances, aimed at the removal of chemical weapons from Syria, and take note of the Syrian Government's reassurances that it is fully committed to the process.

At the same time, we stress that further delays in the removal of chemical weapons, including the most dangerous chemical agents, must be avoided. All necessary equipment is in place. It is now up to the Syrian Government to ensure that all chemical materials are delivered to the port for removal. All parties to the conflict have the responsibility to make sure that the task is carried out on time and without incidents. Furthermore, progress on the chemical-weapons track must be accompanied by tangible and sustained progress on the humanitarian track. Let us not forget that civilians in Syria continue to die from the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, aerial bombing, including incendiary barrel bombs, and mortar shelling. We condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and strongly urge all the parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian authorities, to live up to their legal obligations to protect civilians.

We also urge the warring parties to take all the necessary measures to provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country, ensuring the full and immediate implementation of the Security Council presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). We note the fact that some supplies to places that have been sealed off for months, including Camp Yarmouk, were allowed through in the past few days. However, as Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos stressed in her latest report, such exceptions should become the rule. We commend the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other international humanitarian actors for their efforts, under very difficult circumstances, to provide relief assistance to the suffering population. Lithuania has contributed before, and will continue to do so, in response to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

In a couple of days, the second Geneva Conference on Syria will offer a window of opportunity to end this devastating war. We strongly urge all parties to fully commit to the dialogue and prove that commitment by their actions. The only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition in Syria, based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Syrian women must be part of that solution. Their active participation must be ensured at all stages of negotiation, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Let me turn briefly to Syria's neighbourhood. In recent weeks, Lebanon has been shaken by a series of terrorist attacks. Rocket fire and cross-border strikes from Syria have caused casualties and are adding to the tensions in the country. We appeal to the Lebanese people to preserve their national unity, and appreciate the policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis. We welcome the opening of the Hariri assassination trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It is essential that those who commit acts of terror be held to account. Impunity cannot be allowed to continue.

The recent attacks in Anbar province and elsewhere in Iraq, which claimed multiple lives, remind us of the gravity of threat posed by terrorism. We express our support to the Government of Iraq in countering that threat. We appreciate the efforts of Iraqi security forces, local police and tribal leaders aimed at defeating Al-Qaida affiliates. At the same time, we stress the importance of continued national dialogue and an inclusive political process to ensuring the country's long-term stability and security. We look forward to the holding of free and fair elections in April.

Let me now turn to the Middle East peace process.

Lithuania strongly supports the current United States-backed direct peace negotiations and commends the personal involvement and commitment of Secretary of State John Kerry. We applaud the political courage and statesmanship shown by both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. That is a unique opportunity for a breakthrough in the peace process, which could lead to a viable two-State solution and enable Israel and Palestine to live side-by-side in peace and security. It is crucial, therefore, that both parties — Israel and Palestine — refrain from any unilateral actions that could undermine the negotiations. In that context, new settlement announcements by Israel could potentially be very damaging and could derail the process. Rocket attacks from Gaza to Israel and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza are both a great concern and do they not contribute to the peace process. We underline the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative in achieving peace in the Middle East. All the relevant parties should do everything possible to ensure that those negotiations succeed. Together with our European Union partners, we look forward to working with everyone to achieve a lasting success.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would to congratulate and thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Two decades after the signing of the Oslo Accords between the State of Israel and the then Palestine Liberation Organization, the transitional provisions have given way to a status quo that unfortunately continues to this day. Thus, after 20 years of progress and setbacks in the negotiations, there is still no sign of the desired two-State solution reflecting the principles established in the pertinent United Nations resolutions to allow the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, within secure and internally recognized borders. The peoples of Israel and Palestine and their future generations deserve no less.

Chile recognized the State of Palestine in 2011. In that same year, it supported Palestine's full membership in UNESCO. Subsequently, in 2012, we were a sponsor of General Assembly resolution 67/19, which accorded Palestine the status of a non-member Observer State at the United Nations. We view that policy as a contribution to the peace, as it strengthens the capacities of the Palestinian State.

Owing to the foregoing, Chile welcomes the fact that the parties resumed direct negotiations under United States auspices last August. In particular, we welcome the personal commitment shown by Secretary of State John Kerry, who has visited the region on numerous occasions. In order for the negotiations to move forward, the parties must strengthen dialogue and build trust. That requires ongoing actions and the avoidance of unilateral acts that undermine or destroy confidence. The release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners is pointless if, at the same time, Israel announces the construction of thousands of homes in the settlements located in Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law.

It is also necessary to more strongly condemn the attacks affecting the civilian population of Israel, and measures must be taken to avoid provocative acts and incitement. I take this opportunity to reiterate my country's condemnation of all terrorist acts, in whatever form and whatever their motivation. Terrorism has no place in the world.

Chile supports the Palestinian reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas, agreed in Doha and Cairo in 2012. We believe that the Islamic Resistance Movement must renounce the use of arms and recognize Israel's right to exist. Chile will continue to encourage the constructive, consistent commitment of Palestine and Israel to the current peace negotiations aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in accordance with international law. It is our hope that that will be possible.

The conflict in Syria is of particular concern, as it has caused over 100,000 deaths. Regrettably, in nearly three years, the Council has been unable to adopt a resolution that, it was hoped, would end the tragedy. Nevertheless, the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) marked a turning point. Thanks to the joint work of the Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, progress has been made towards destroying the Syrian chemical arsenal through an unprecedented effort of the international community. However, it should be recalled that that is only one aspect of the conflict, in which conventional weapons have caused the most victims. Our country therefore reiterates that the provision of military supplies to any of the parties must halt in order to avoid exacerbating the conflict and the suffering of the civilian population.

The humanitarian crisis requires the Security Council to make every possible effort to call on the parties to the conflict to fulfil their obligations in relation to international humanitarian and human rights law, while guaranteeing the protection of civilians and the rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel. We call for the urgent implementation of the Security Council's presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of 2 October 2013. The International Humanitarian Pledging Conference, held in Kuwait, which dealt with humanitarian and refugee assistance, represents a step in the right direction.

Chile supports the efforts made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi towards the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria and hopes that that meeting will generate momentum for a political agreement. The participation of all international actors in a position to influence the parties is necessary in order to ensure a political agreement. For their part, the parties must agree not to undermine the principles of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex), whether or not they participated in that meeting. It is our hope that the parties will implement humanitarian measures to address the critical situation and efforts towards the building of mutual confidence in order to achieve the necessary political agreement. We reiterate the importance of women being represented at every level in the debates on the Syrian Arab Republic in order to ensure that their concerns are be duly considered and acted upon.

The deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon is reflected — inter alia — in the clashes between pro-Al-Assad and anti-Al-Assad demonstrators in Tripoli, the attack on the Iranian embassy, the assassination of former Minister Mohamad Chatah and the recent bombing in the southern Beirut suburb of Haret Hreik and the town of Hermel. Chile appeals to the Lebanese political leaders to promote the agreements needed to ensure the country's institutional functionality. In addition, it is important to encourage Lebanese society to implement the dissociation policy established in the Baabda Declaration.

We believe that it is the will of the international community to support Lebanon by promoting stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity, especially now that the Special Tribunal created to try the suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has started its hearings, which form a crucial element of the task of combating impunity.

Chile maintains far-reaching ties with communities in the Middle East and stands ready to join with the international community in mapping out the road to peace and progress for the inhabitants of the region.

I conclude by thanking all of those that have welcomed my country upon its election as a non-permanent member of the Council.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you today, Mr. Minister, as President of the Security Council. We also congratulate Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Council.

The General Assembly has designated the year 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Russian Federation shares the Secretary-General's belief that the year represents an important stage in achieving the two-State solution and stands ready to make every effort to ensure that it becomes a reality. However, as in any quarrel, the resolution of this out-dated dispute must be worked out by the conflicting parties. We are carefully following the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process, including attempts — first and foremost by the United States of America — to bring the parties towards an agreed framework to define the future principles of the final status solution.

Russia is in favour of a comprehensive, equitable, long-term settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, based on the well-known international framework of the establishment of an integral, independent Palestinian State within internationally recognized borders, existing in peace and security with all of its neighbours. Naturally, any solution must be acceptable to both sides; imposed or inequitable solutions will not last long. We continue to actively participate in negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on a bilateral or multilateral basis and, especially, within the framework of the international mediators of the Middle East Quartet.

In that context, we note the scaling-up of efforts at the level of Special Representative, in which context the most recent meeting took place in Paris on 12 January. We believe that that meeting was most useful. It is our continuing belief that the Quartet's efforts should also draw upon the work of the League of Arab States. In our contacts with Palestinians and Israelis, we continue to urge both sides towards substantive negotiations on all final status issues. In two days, my country will welcome the President of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to Moscow.

We are extremely concerned regarding the situation on the ground. Settlement construction continues, effectively annulling even small good-will gestures, such as the freeing of Palestinian detainees who had been in Israeli prisons since the signing of the Oslo accords. We are also concerned about continuing raids by the Israeli military in the West Bank, which have resulted in the killing and wounding of many Palestinians, as well as rampant settler violence.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the number of Palestinians evicted from homes that were demolished by Israel in 2013 totalled 1,100, representing a 25 per cent increase over the previous year. We also adamantly condemn the launching of rockets against Israeli territory, whatever justification might be presented. Security breaches along the Gaza Strip must cease. All of these aggravating incidents are far from conducive to the holding of negotiations.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is not improving; on the contrary, the isolation of Gaza from the rest of the world is growing, which only exacerbates the negative social, economic and humanitarian consequences. The problem of Gaza should be resolved comprehensively, including through the full lifting of the Israeli blockade and the restoration of a united administration in the Palestinian territories. We remain convinced that bridging the existing Palestinian split on the basis of the Palestinian Authority's platform and the Arab Peace Initiative would be in line with the aspirations for peace for Israel and Palestine. Achieving a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli solution — and, even less likely, consolidating its results — will clearly be impossible without Palestinian unity.

We attach great significance to the launching of talks between the Government of Syria and the opposition, with the constructive assistance of the international community. We support the Secretary-General's responsible and principled approach in issuing an invitation to participate in those efforts to all those who could directly have an influence on the situation in Syria, including Iran. Not ensuring the participation of such key players would be an unforgivable error. Those who would call into question that need are clearly not interested in an equitable resolution of the Syrian crisis. We call upon the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which has decided to attend the Conference, and invite it to cease the practice of imposing preconditions. We find it unfortunate that the opposition delegation does not include the participation of patriotic groups of internal opponents, such as the National Coordination Committee and a number of leading Kurdish groups, which constitutes an attack on the credibility and the representative nature of the opposition.

We would nevertheless like to note the intention and full readiness of the Syrian Government to send to Switzerland a representative and a fully mandated delegation. We also note other measures taken by Damascus, such as its response to the Russian appeal concerning the humanitarian situation. That pertains to the delivery of humanitarian goods in residential areas in Guta and other areas, including Damascus and Aleppo. In that regard, we have seen a willingness to exchange civilians taken hostage by fighters in exchange for prisoners in Government prisons. The practical implementation of those measures requires cooperation by the armed opposition in ensuring safe access for humanitarian goods. We hope that the Government, which has stood ready to do that, will be met with similar steps by the opposition. We expect that the pledges made in Kuwait will be honoured soon. It is important that the United Nations streamline the contributions and distribute the various types of assistance that have been offered.

We continue to work tirelessly to bolster inter-Syrian dialogue to finally put an end to the bloodshed, to stop making Syria into a hotbed of international and regional terrorism, to ensure conditions for peace and calm, and to ensure that the country retains its sovereign territorial integrity and as a secular and an independent State where all rights of ethnic and interreligious groups are ensured.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the representative of the State of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their statements.

I shall touch on several points — the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the situation in Syria — before saying a few words about Lebanon.

In the Middle East, everything must be done to ensure that the efforts of the United States Secretary of State are crowned with success. France lends its full support to the efforts of the United States, particularly those of the Secretary of State, to drive forward the negotiations that are under way. The parametres for a solution are well known and have been set forth in several Security Council resolutions. The eventual acceptance by the parties of an initiative by the United States on a framework for the negotiations, broadly outlining a resolution to the conflict, could constitute significant progress towards a definitive peace agreement. Twenty years after Oslo, any interim formula must be discarded.

In order to ensure progress in the current efforts, the parties must refrain from any gesture likely to undermine the process, particularly as far as settlements are concerned. Along with its European partners, France has condemned the publication of a call for proposals by the Israeli authorities, on 10 January, to build more than 1,800 homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, following the approval given on 5 January to build new homes in the settlements of Ofra and Karnei Shomron in the West Bank. The French President called on the Israeli authorities to totally and finally halt the settlements when he visited Israel and Palestine from 17 to 19 November 2013.

In its conclusions of 16 December, the European Union presented the details of the unprecedented special privilege partnerships that would be offered to the parties in the event of a definitive agreement, which is of course the goal of the current efforts. That partnership would cover economic, political, security and social aspects, thereby allowing for stronger cooperation between the European Union an the two States, bolstering and helping with the construction of the Palestinian State and promoting trade and economic and human development in the region.

On Syria, gGiven the suffering of the people and the destruction of the country, fatalism must not prevail. We hope that this week will prove a decisive one. The second Geneva Conference on Syria will begin in Montreux on Wednesday, 22 January. France and its international partners have done everything in their power to assist the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to prepare for that important Conference. We should welcome the decision taken this weekend in Istanbul by the Syrian opposition to participate in the Conference under the aegis of the National Coalition.

That decision was not an automatic one. The ongoing brutal repression, especially in Aleppo; the fact that civilians are caught in the fighting; the lack of humanitarian access to areas under the control of the opposition, in which Yarmouk is one of the most tragic examples; and, finally, the provocative statements about maintaining President Bashar Al-Assad in power at all costs in the midst of presidential elections, which no reasonable person would recognize as legitimate; and the outrageous reply from Mr. Mouallem to the Secretary-General's invitation to the Conference — everything has been done by the regime to deter the opposition from participating in that exercise.

The Secretary-General's invitation to the second Geneva Conference on Syria was unambiguous. The goal of the Conference is the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), namely, the establishement of a transitional Government with full executive powers, including, of course, over the armed forces and the security services. We are in agreement in acknowledging that this document is a reference point for a political solution in Syria. The attempts by the regime to impose its interpretation on the second Geneva Conference on Syria will not fool anyone.

When it comes to Iran, it must be clear to everyone that any participation in the second Geneva Conference on Syria is conditional to the explicit acceptance of the mandate laid down in the invitation letter to the Conference from the Secretary-General, to which I have just referred. One cannot claim to support a political process out of the crisis in good faith while rejecting the goal and the parametres. In that connection, the questions raised by the Syrian National Coalition are legitimate and should be answered.

Although this is obvious, I would also remind the Council that those with blood on their hands — those who bear responsibility for the crimes committed in the course of more than two years — must not play a part in the political transition. We wish to see those matters brought before the International Criminal Court.

Against that backdrop, we must also send a message of support to Lebanon. We support the determination of the Lebanese authorities to protect themselves from the political repercussion of the Syrian crisis, in line with the Baabda Declaration of June 2012, as they combat all forms of terrorism and commit to combating impunity. The opening of the trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon marks a decisive stage in combating impunity for terrorist acts.

Lebanon urgently needs a Government capable of taking decisions, given a political, economic and social situation increasingly fraught with difficulties. It must also be able to count on functioning institutions that can help with the influx of almost 1 million refugees from Syria. We must continue to mobilize to support that country, particularly within the context of the International Support Group for Lebanon.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I would like to warmly welcome you, Mr. President, and to congratulate you on Jordan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I wish also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing, which has provided us with a wealth of insights into the current situation in the Middle East.

Our intervention will focus on three aspects: peace between Israel and Palestine; Syria; and Lebanon. We believe, first, that the immediate attainment of peace between Israel and Palestine is central to the normalization of the situation in the Middle East and also of vital importance to global peace and security.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Nigeria's support for a two-State solution that would allow Israel and Palestine to live together side by side in peace and security. Peace between Israel and Palestine, we believe, will not only have a beneficial impact on both countries, but also constitute the key to peace in the Middle East as a region.

On 29 July 2013, direct final-status talks between Israel and Palestine resumed after a long hiatus. We commend the efforts of the United States Government and Secretary of State John Kerry's personal commitment in restarting the talks. The international community can lend momentum to this effort by supporting the current peace process.

We note that a period of nine months was decided upon within which a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding issues would be reached. We are now in the sixth month, and we urge all parties to make greater strides in their efforts towards the attainment of peace.

The United State-brokered peace talks are now at a critical stage. The recent announcement of the Israeli Government's plan to build 1,400 housing units in Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank may not be helpful to the peace process. We urge Israel to reconsider this plan, which is capable of derailing the peace talks.

Nigeria is not unmindful of the need to guarantee Israel's security and continued existence as a sovereign State. It is for this reason that we support the comprehensive discussion of all final-status issues so as to leave no room for continuation of the conflict, which has lasted far too long for any side's comfort or interest. We encourage both sides to carefully examine the United States plan for security arrangements, with a view to moving forward towards the adoption of an accord that would address those proposals.

We also note that the members of the Quartet met at the highest level on 27 September 2013 and reaffirmed their determination to lend effective support to both parties. We wish to stress, however, that efforts to strengthen the Palestinian economy and build Palestinian institutions should be seen as supportive of the peace process and not necessarily as supplanting it. We believe that priority must be given to the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

We note and welcome the meeting held in Amman between King Abdullah II and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last Thursday, 16 January, to discuss the peace process and seek ways to move it forward. We encourage such exchanges as confidence-building measures and transparent attempts in the search for lasting peace in the Middle East.

Concerning Syria, while we welcome the progress recorded in the elimination of the country's chemical weapons under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons/United Nations joint mission, we urge the world not to lose sight of the ongoing civil war in the country, which has claimed over 100,000 lives and displaced millions of people, both internally and across Syria's borders. The humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis remains a matter of great concern to Nigeria, especially considering the fact that millions of children are reported to be among the victims.

The gender dimension of the crisis is also of concern to us. We are deeply disturbed by reports of women being increasingly targeted for assault and violence, particularly in refugee camps, where they are supposed to feel safe and, indeed, protected. We deplore and condemn such acts of violence against women and would like to see the perpetrators brought to justice. The hardship and indignities that Syrian women face in the refugee camps deeply diminish our humanity, and we call on all sides in the conflict to ensure, at all times, the safety and dignity of women embroiled in the crisis.

Today the need for the return of peace to Syria is more urgent than ever. It is our hope that the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled for this week, will create the conditions necessary to attain that much-desired objective. We encourage all parties to the conflict to participate in the Conference without preconditions. We reaffirm our stance that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Only a political solution attained through a transparent and inclusive process can lead to peace in Syria. Nigeria's desire is to see, in the very near future, a peaceful, prosperous, united and democratic Syria taking its rightful place in the world.

Turning to Lebanon, we are unequivocal in our condemnation of the recent spate of terrorist attacks, which left several Lebanese citizens dead and dozens injured. Such attacks threaten the peace and stability of the country and add another dimension to an already difficult security situation. President Sleiman has stated that immunizing Lebanon against such attacks will require solidarity between the leaders and the people. We urge the people of Lebanon to unite and stand firm with their leaders against any attempt to inject despair and disunity into the body politic. Attacking innocent and defenceless people will not in any way address the political differences of the parties or, indeed, advance the unity and progress of Lebanon. Only honest dialogue and recourse to peaceful means can prove beneficial and long-lasting in the attainment of any political agenda.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): Mr. President, I welcome your Foreign Minister's presence in the Security Council today, and I should like also to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and the representatives of Palestine and Israel for their contributions to this debate.

As we enter 2014, we are at a moment of opportunity for the Middle East peace process. Entering back into direct negotiations last year was a bold step forward. It was a welcome move towards peace in a troubled area. It is the responsibility of all of us here to support the parties, led by the United States, to capitalize on this opportunity.

My Government continues to put its full support behind Secretary Kerry and his team, and we urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to continue their admirable focus and commitment.

This year started on a positive note, with the implementation of Israel's brave decision to release the third tranche of Palestinian prisoners. The United Kingdom firmly believes that such steps, despite their difficulty, are important to achieving a lasting peace and security.

However, we are very concerned by Israel's decision to announce further settlement-building in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. My Government condemns these announcements and considers such actions as a serious threat to peace. We urge Israel to avoid any further illegal settlement activity and to reverse the advancement of plans. The United Kingdom has also been clear that for this process to be a success, the people on the ground, both Israelis and Palestinians, need to see the real and tangible benefits of peace. We therefore remain deeply concerned about the 663 Palestinian-owned homes and livelihood structures demolished in Area C and East Jerusalem in 2013. Demolitions and evictions are harmful to the peace process and in all but the most limited circumstances are contrary to international humanitarian law.

Reports of price tag attacks, including on a mosque in Deir Istiya village on 15 January, are also of serious concern. We condemn such acts and urge the Israeli authorities to bring those responsible to justice. We are also concerned about rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel and, in particular, condemn the rockets fired at Ashkelon on 16 January in violation of international law. All parties must respect the 12 November ceasefire agreement in full. The people of Gaza and Israel will only lose from further violence.

There will be difficult decisions in the months ahead, but we urge all those involved to keep their shared goal in mind — a negotiated two-State solution leading to a sovereign, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside a safe and secure Israel. The United Kingdom stands ready to do its part. That is why we strongly back the European

Union's readiness to offer an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support to both parties in the event that a final status deal is reached.

On Syria, the Secretary-General has made clear that the aim of this week's second Geneva Conference on Syria is to assist the Syrian parties in ending the violence and achieving a comprehensive agreement for a political settlement, implementing fully the Geneva communiqué (S/2013/523, annex), while preserving the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. As the permanent members of the Council agreed on 30 June 2012, and as was endorsed by the full Security Council in resolution 2118 (2013) last September, that means agreeing to the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers formed by mutual consent to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people.

Yesterday, the Secretary-General announced that he was extending an invitation to Iran to attend the opening of the Conference at Montreux on the basis that it acknowledges that the Conference's purpose is the full implementation of the original Geneva communiqué. If the Iranians are to attend, it is now vital that their Government confirm publicly and clearly that they share that understanding. We have also urged the United Nations, as mandated by the Security Council in many resolutions, including resolution 2122 (2013) of October 2013, to ensure a full role for women in the Syrian peace negotiations.

It is important to remember that those negotiations will be a process, not a single event. We should not underestimate the formidable challenges ahead, and we must not lose sight of the desperate situation that Syrian civilians are facing on a daily basis. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights now puts the death toll at over 125,000 people. In Aleppo and across all of Syria, we have seen the regime continue to attack its own civilian population with barrel bombs. That indiscriminate bombardment is yet another war crime on the part of the regime, and Al-Assad and those around him should have no doubt that the world will hold them to account. The situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The humanitarian crisis has reached catastrophic proportions. Eleven million Syrians are in desperate need of urgent assistance, particularly in besieged and hard to reach areas. It is an unparalleled crisis, and the world needs to respond accordingly.

We welcome the $2.4 billion of pledges made at the Kuwait pledging conference last week. My Government announced a further pledge of $163 million in humanitarian assistance, bringing our total contribution to nearly $1 billion — the largest sum that the United Kingdom has ever committed to a single crisis. The funding is going towards meeting the basic life-saving needs of Syrians affected by the conflict, both inside Syria and in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. We pay tribute to those neighbouring countries, including Jordan, for the burden they are carrying to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

But increased funding can make a difference only if there is progress on access and protection for humanitarian actors in Syria, where 21 United Nations staff members remain in Government detention and 47 humanitarian workers have now been killed. Progress on implementing the Council's presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) remains extremely limited. It is unacceptable that humanitarian organizations are being deliberately obstructed by the regime from delivering aid. The regime has shown that it can facilitate access for chemical weapons inspectors; it needs to show the same commitment to ensuring aid reaches those most in need.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, we warmly welcome you to the Security Council and congratulate you on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council.

I would like first of all to commend the Council for its initiative to include the situation in the Middle East on its agenda and for the constant interest it has shown in that question. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and the representative of Israel and observer of the State of Palestine for their statements. I would also like to welcome all delegations that have joined the list to speak in the Council today.

When talking about the situation in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes first to mind despite the seriousness of the Syrian crisis and its impact on its neighbouring countries such as Lebanon. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — which, given its enduring nature, complexity and regional implications, remains a major concern of the international community — we, like many others, believe that in the absence of a final, just and equitable solution that will guarantee security for Israel and an independent and viable State for the Palestinians, it would be difficult to claim that an effective and lasting peace has been achieved in the Middle East. In that regard, legal frameworks and possible potential solutions to conflicts having disastrous consequences that have lasted for far too long are already contained in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and existing agreements between the two parties.

Therefore, Palestinians and Israelis must make greater efforts to continue negotiations to reach a comprehensive resolution of all issues inherent in final status that will put an end to the occupation and conflict. These include the issues of territory, security, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and water, all of which should be based on the principle of two States living side by side, where each party recognizes the legitimate right of the other to live in peace and security. In our humble opinion, only a negotiated, just and lasting settlement is likely to enable the Palestinian people to regain their basic rights and the Israeli people to live in peace and security within the borders of 1967.

The option for peace is naturally incompatible with the continued colonization of the occupied territories, the continued blockade of Gaza, air strikes on civilians and rocket attacks against innocent Israeli citizens. Those actions not only undermine the peace process but also undermine the efforts of the international community, which is working towards the two-State solution.

For us, it is clear that the time has come to recognize a State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel. We must have the courage to take that step as it is essential to advancing peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. In that regard, we welcome the General Assembly decision in resolution 67/19 to grant to Palestine non-member observer State status in the Organization and UNESCO's decision to admit Palestine as a member. In any event, we welcome and encourage the efforts of the international community in general, and of the United States of America, in particular, to revive direct negotiations between the two parties to the conflict. Those efforts, however laudable, are insufficient in and of themselves; both parties must still demonstrate a genuine political will to overcome the current impasse so that a new impetus can be given to negotiations.

We therefore urgently call on the entire international community, including the United Nations, the European Union, the League of Arab States, as well as States with influence on both parties, to further encourage the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take steps to build mutual trust in order to resume direct negotiations.

We are deeply troubled by the situation in Syria. It calls on us all to act because the current situation is particularly serious. We do not have the right to let an entire population fall to its demise. The use of chemical weapons, which speaks to a dramatic escalation of the civil war in that country, is an affront to the human conscience and the ideals that led to the founding of our Organization. While we welcome the process to destroy Syrian chemical weapons launched following the agreement between the United States and Russia, my country would like to see those who have used those weapons identified and brought before an international tribunal.

Moreover, we are horrified to see Syria deteriorate to this point and to see Syrians kill each other with such violence. The international community must spare no effort in stopping that tragedy. The alleged serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the bombing of civilians and summary executions must be categorically condemned and the perpetrators — whoever they may be — must be prosecuted. We also express our dismay at the atrocities committed by terrorist groups linked to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, which are exacerbating the situation with their fierce fighting, leading to hundreds of deaths, not to mention the abuses of which they are guilty.

Given that chaos, we hope that the second Geneva Conference on Syria, scheduled to begin on 22 January, will provide an appropriate solution to the Syrian crisis by bringing together all segments of Syrian society and meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Chad hopes that the Syrian National Coalition does not backpedal on its courageous decision to take part in the Conference.

We strongly hope that the Conference can stop the cycle of violence and provide a lasting solution to the Syrian crisis. If the negotiations at the second Geneva Conference lead to a solution to the crisis, which we dearly hope for, the international community must immediately start thinking about support measures for Syria in its reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts.

Finally, I want to talk about the situation in Lebanon, which has borne the brunt of the consequences of the Syrian crisis. Recently, Lebanon has become a stage for car bombings and other deadly terrorist attacks, which we firmly condemn. In that regard, allow me to welcome the opening last Thursday in The Hague, before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, of the trial in absentia of the alleged assassins of former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri and 21 other individuals.

The cycle of attacks and reprisals committed since the past summer in Lebanon could exacerbate intercommunal tensions and threaten the already fragile national unity. Besides the violence, the presence in Lebanon of more than 1 million Syrian refugees is also a source of tension, which could further complicate the situation. Given the risk of the destabilization of Lebanon, the international community must pay greater attention to the situation of that country in order to help it better withstand the consequences of the Syrian crisis and preserve its unity, cohesion and stability.

Mr. Nibishaka (Rwanda): Allow me to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, as well as on the peace prospects in the region.

Rwanda wishes to express its appreciation to all stakeholders involved in the Middle East peace process, particularly the United States Government through Secretary of State John Kerry. We commend his tireless efforts in bringing both sides to direct negotiations, and we hope that the parties will seize this opportunity to chart the way forward towards a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestian conflict. The current negotiations are at a critical moment that requires both sides to demonstrate not only trust, decency and sincerity, but also readiness to sacrifice some of their important positions so as to reach a genuine peace agreement.

Rwanda is confident that the two parties can reach a two-State solution for both peoples, with a viable independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace with a secure Israel. In order to reach that agreement, there must an intentional show of good will and confidence-building between Israel and the Palestinian people, such as refraining from cross-border attacks and from all provocations, including negative media propaganda and all forms of incitement to violence that would jeopardize the ongoing negotiations.

In that regard, we commend the Israeli Government for continuing to honour its commitment by releasing the third batch of 26 Palestinian prisoners, and we welcome the recent measure undertaken by the Palestinian Authority and facilitated by the Government of Israel to respond to the direct impact of the recent storm, which included permitting the delivery of water pumps, humanitarian assistance and 1.2 millions litres of industrial fuel to the Gaza power plant, as part of the Qatari donation. However, my delegation strongly condemns the continued rocket attacks into southern Israel from Gaza, which remain a significant concern of ongoing negotiations. We call on all parties concerned in Gaza to participate in the peace process, which is the only viable channel to the stability of the region. Acts of that kind threaten to worsen the already fragile situation on the ground and could derail the ongoing negotiations.

With regard to the Syrian conflict, Rwanda is extremely concerned by the deteriorating situation in that country, which makes it more urgent to put an end to the violence and to the suffering of the Syrian people, and to find a political solution. We still believe that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and the cost of war is too high to endure. The crisis has already claimed more than 100,000 innocent lives, with over 9 million in urgent humanitarian need. We urge all parties to respond positively to the opportunity to find a political solution through the second Geneva Conference on Syria and to cease hostilities. It is also important that the concerned States, particularly the permanent members of this body dedicated to peace and security, stop supplying weapons to conflicting parties that are responsible for gross violations of human rights.

In that connection, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the United States and the Russian Federation, as well as to the United Nations through the Joint Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for their efforts in bringing all parties together to resolve the crisis in Syria. In that context, Rwanda is concerned about the thousands of innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly, who have been trapped or besieged in contested areas and cut off from aid for a month now due to continued fighting between the Government and the rebel forces.

We welcome the high-level pledging conference for Syria that took place on 15 January in Kuwait, and we thank the donor community for its strong commitment.

We urge all those who pledged to honour their pledges in time to serve the critical conditions of the Syrians. We also call on all parties in Syria to take all appropriate measures to facilitate safe and unhindered access to populations in need of assistance, as put forward by the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). It is important that the parties to the conflict observe local ceasefires in order to help humanitarian assistance to reach the needy, and that they respect all their obligations under international law.

With regard to Lebanon, we welcome the opening of the trial by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon of four suspects nearly nine years after the heinous attacks that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 other people. Nevertheless, the overall situation in Lebanon seems to be deteriorating. Rwanda strongly condemns the recent series of violent attacks in Beirut and in the northern city of Tripoli, as well as the shelling in the Bekaa Valley that resulted in several deaths and injuries. Of equal concern is the continued sectarian tension in Lebanon, which is identified as part of the spill-over from the Syrian conflict. We reiterate that the only path to ending these sectarian tensions and violence in Lebanon will entirely depend on a positive outcome of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which is expected to end the Syrian conflict.

My delegation continues to urge the Lebanese Government to remain steadfast to the Baabda Declaration, setting out a policy of disassociation with regard to the conflict in Syria. We further encourage all parties in Lebanon to show commitment and compromise in forming a new Lebanese Government, which will facilitate the ending of tensions.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the presence of Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, to preside over today's open debate. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. China also listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Israel and Palestine.

The question of Palestine has always been a core issue of the situation in the Middle East. It has remained unresolved for a long time, which has not only brought severe suffering to the Palestinian people but also made it impossible to achieve peace between Palestine and Israel, much less peace and stability in the Middle East. Establishing an independent State of Palestine and the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel are the only way forward and also an important guarantee for achieving long-term peace and stability in the Middle East.

China has always maintained that the parties concerned should adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, and, on this basis and through political negotiations, establish an independent State of Palestine, with full sovereignty based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

China supports the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, which are at a critical juncture. If they do not forge ahead, they will suffer a setback. Palestine and Israel should recognize each other's right to exist and accommodate the other's reasonable concerns. This is indispensable for the progress of any negotiations. We sincerely hope that Palestine and Israel will seize this opportunity, seek common ground and demonstrate good will so as to promptly find a definitive solution and promote early substantive progress in the peace talks.

China is opposed to Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and other occupied Palestinian territories. In the current circumstances, an end to settlement activities and violence against innocent civilians, as well as the full lifting of the blockade against the Gaza Strip, are of critical importance to maintaining an environment conducive to the peace talks.

The General Assembly has designated 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. With the ongoing turbulence in the Middle East, the international community should proceed on the basis of the overall goal of maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, strengthen the sense of urgency in seeking a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question, and enhance efforts to encourage the relevant parties to achieve peace through talks. China hopes that the Quartet will take concrete measures in that regard. We support the Security Council in playing a greater role in finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli question.

China has always attached great importance to the question of the Middle East and is committed to promoting the peace process. In May 2013, for the first time ever, China received simultaneous visits from

Palestinian and Israeli leaders. President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal for a solution to the Palestinian question, fully demonstrating the Chinese Government's sincerity and positive attitude in promoting peace in the Middle East. In December 2013, Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi visited Palestine and Israel and further encouraged both parties to achieve peace through talks. China will continue to follow the four-point proposal put forward by President Xi Jinping, work hard to promote peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis, and play a greater role so as to make it due contribution to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

China has closely followed the situation in Syria. Developments over the past three years have fully demonstrated that military means will not settle the question of Syria. Political settlement through dialogue and negotiation is the only correct choice and is also the object of international consensus. It is also, more importantly, the direction that all the parties must follow in the future.

We welcome and support the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to be held on 22 January in Switzerland. Yesterday, Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi put forward a five-point proposal for a political solution to the question of Syria. First, the Syrian issue must be resolved through political means. Secondly, the future of Syria must be decided by its own people. Thirdly, an inclusive political transition process must be promoted. Fourthly, national reconciliation and unity must be achieved in Syria. Fifthly, humanitarian assistance must be delivered in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

The second Geneva Conference on Syria will mark the beginning of dialogue and negotiations, which should be an ongoing process. We hope that all the parties in Syria will work with the future of the nation and the overall interests of the entire Syrian people in mind, demonstrate political will, seize the opportunity, come to the negotiating table and seek common ground so as to find a solution that meets national needs and takes into consideration the interests of all of the parties.

The international community should firmly uphold the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms guiding international relations; commit itself to maintaining the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria; respect the will and choice of the Syrian people; adopt a just, balanced and impartial attitude; play a constructive role in promoting peace talks; create favourable conditions for the political transition; and support the efforts of the Secretary-General and Mr. Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, so as to maintain and fully leverage the United Nations leading role in good offices and mediation.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7096 (Resumption 1)

Security Council
Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7096th meeting
Monday, 20 January 2014, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estreme
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Asselborn
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Cho Tae-yul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nibishaka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to start by congratulating Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I would also like to commend the Permanent Mission of France for its excellent stewardship of the Council in December.

(*spoke in English*)

Last July, when we spoke before this Council, we commended the efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry towards the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in the hope that they would lead to a just and lasting peace, which in our view can be based only on the principles and rules of international law, the relevant decisions of the United Nations, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. However, we also said — and I apologize for quoting from our own statement:

> "Still, let us state it loud and clear: the main danger facing such negotiations is the continuation of provocative Israeli actions capable of undermining them. To protect the negotiations, those actions ought to be completely stopped. Obviously, there is no better example of such actions than the unabated construction in the past months of Israeli settlements at an unprecedented rate, let alone the approval of new settlement units." (*S/PV.7007, p. 31*)

In October, we sounded the alarm anew, drawing the attention of the Council once more to the dangers of the unrelenting Israeli settlement activities to the prospects for the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, and we called on the Council to condemn them in the strongest terms (see S/PV.7047). While the Council remained silent, the roar of the Israeli bulldozers destroying Palestinian homes in Jerusalem and uprooting olive trees in the West Bank to pave the way for yet more settlements could be clearly heard. As has already been mentioned, the Israeli authorities announced earlier this month their intention to build 1,400 new housing units in the occupied territories.

We are sure that you, Mr. President, realize that we are at a historic crossroads. To say the least, the future of the negotiations has undoubtedly been put in jeopardy by the unabated settlement activity. The silence of the Council does not serve the cause of peace. To save the prospects for peace in our part of the world, the Council ought to make itself heard. For the sake of peace, we urge it to act without delay.

Let me turn now to another challenge facing the Council. Last week, on 15 January, at the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, hosted by the Government of Kuwait, the figures spoke for themselves with regard to the magnitude of the Syrian tragedy — over 120,000 people killed, including about 11,000 children; 9.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; 6.5 million internally displaced; and 2.2 million refugees in neighbouring countries. It is a humanitarian catastrophe that is unprecedented in recent history. Lebanon welcomes the generous pledges made during the Conference and will continue to work closely with the donor community to alleviate the suffering of the refugees and their host communities.

As the conflict unfolds in Syria, the flow of refugees into Lebanon continues unabated at an average rate of 3,000 a day. Months ago, the number of refugees exceeded 1 million, which is almost a quarter of the population of my country. Clearly, that has begun to have an existential dimension in Lebanon, which is the smallest of the host countries but has the highest number of refugees, whether in relation to the population of those countries or in absolute terms.

The suffering of the Syrians in Syria must end, and the flow of Syrian refugees must stop. It is high time that the international community assume its humanitarian responsibilities and act with one voice so as to ensure humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid to Syria and establish camps within Syria and on its borders. That could allow for the dignified and gradual return of Syrian refugees from the host countries to their own nation. To all those who may believe that approach to be unrealistic, allow me to say the following. Aware of its humanitarian responsibilities and legal obligations, Lebanon has kept its borders open to all those fleeing the horrors of violence and destruction in Syria and will continue to do so. It is unrealistic here not to acknowledge that Lebanon can no longer cope alone with the pressures and burdens resulting from that situation.

Moreover, since the Council succeeded in unanimously adopting resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria, is it unrealistic to hope that it could still show a similar commitment in addressing the humanitarian situation there? More importantly, on the eve of the date set for the second Geneva Conference on Syria, is it unrealistic to also hope that that same international leadership will be renewed to ensure the full implementation of the June 2012 Geneva communiqué and its action plan (S/2012/522, annex) in order to help fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people and put an end to their ongoing ordeal?

Despite all the challenges facing my country, Lebanon remains committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and stresses the need for the Council to act swiftly so as to put an immediate end to the systematic Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty by land, air and sea. My delegation has kept the Council informed of those violations and has requested that its letters to that effect be circulated as official documents of the United Nations.

The most recent of those letters was dated 9 January, when we submitted a complaint against Israel for launching electronic warfare on Lebanon. We informed the President of the Council that Israel had increased the number of sites, towers, antennas and other monitoring, espionage and surveillance devices installed along the Lebanese border. We called on the Council to assume its responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and security by condemning such blatant violations of international law and by taking the necessary measures to put an end to them.

Recently, my country was also the victim of several terrorist attacks, from the targeting of the Iranian Embassy to the assassination of former Minister Mohamad Chatah, the car bomb in the southern suburbs of Beirut and the attack in Hermel. Time and again, the Council condemned those attacks and stressed the need to bring the perpetrators to justice. Lebanon expresses its deep appreciation for the Council's continued support for its stability and security.

Furthermore, last week, the Council welcomed the beginning of the trial proceedings of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and stressed the vital importance of combating impunity so as to strengthen the long-term stability and security in Lebanon. In turn, the President of the Republic of Lebanon, General Michel Sleiman, clearly stated that the start of the trials was a sure step towards uncovering the truth behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and would ensure that the perpetrators did not think that they could evade justice.

Finally, the launching of the International Support Group for Lebanon in September was based on the consensus expressed in the presidential statement adopted in July by the Council (S/PRST/2013/9), which stressed "the need for strong, coordinated international support for Lebanon to help it continue to withstand the multiple current challenges to its security and stability". In that respect, the Group also underlined the importance of Lebanon's policy of disassociation and the Baabda Declaration of 12 June 2012.

Today, more than ever, such support is needed to help shield Lebanon from the spillover of the Syrian crisis and from my country being turned anew into a battlefield of regional rivalries and proxy wars.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to congratulate the Kingdom of Jordan on its accession to the Security Council and on its assumption of the presidency in the first month of its tenure. I would also like to congratulate Chad, Nigeria, Lithuania and Chile on their joining the Council. I would like to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning and to reiterate Egypt's support for the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Palestinian question remains unresolved, despite the many efforts by the international community, including the Security Council, since the establishment of the Organization, with serious repercussions for the Palestinians and all countries of the region, as well as international peace and security. That is most clearly reflected in the recent atrocities at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria, where Palestinian refugees are dying of starvation in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That also applies to Gaza, where the population still suffers from an illegal blockade. It also applies to Israel, which continues to feel threatened despite its sophisticated arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and its superiority in traditional weapons and their means of delivery.

The past quarter has seen a number of important developments that reflect how critical the situation in Palestine has become.

The first development is the relentless commitment of the United States to help both sides to reach agreement, including consecutive high-level visits by the Secretary of State to the region to secure that goal. We strongly support those efforts and look forward the achievement of a just solution that guarantees the establishment of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State on all the territories occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel.

Secondly, statements were issued by senior Israeli officials that questioned the two-State solution and the availability of a real partner for peace. The same officials raised new and controversial issues that could complicate the prospects for reaching an agreement. The Prime Minister informed his party's Cabinet members that he would not accept any reference to Jerusalem in the framework agreement, and insisted on the acknowledgement of Israel as a Jewish State and on keeping additional illegal settlement blocks under Israeli sovereignty. The Minister for Foreign Affairs proposed a plan to exchange and transfer populations, in addition to the exchange of land. The Minister of Defence criticized the security plan proposed by the United States, and insisted on keeping Israeli troops in the Jordan Valley for security reasons. The former chief of the Mossad recently reaffirmed that the Jordan Valley was not essential to Israel's security.

Thirdly, the third batch of Palestinian prisoners have been released. That is a welcome development. However, it was followed by a call for bids to construct thousands of new units in settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank. France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy conveyed to the Israeli Ambassadors in their respective capitals messages that such steps did not help the peace process. The Israeli Government ignored those messages and summoned its Ambassadors from those countries in protest to the messages, which were aimed at implementing international law and Council resolutions. Egypt looks forward to action by the Security Council aimed at halting all subversive attempts to undermine the peace process, and to further measures by the European Union. We welcome the suspension of the Dutch water company's cooperation with its Israeli counterpart because of Israel's illegal settlement activity, and its suspension of further investments in Israeli banks that finance settlements.

Fourthly, Palestinians remain subject to attacks by settlers and Israeli security forces in the occupied territories. Israel's continued retaliatory air raids and shelling of Gaza have resulted in a number of injuries and casualties. A number of short-range missiles were fired into Israel as well. However, there were no reported injuries or casualties.

Pressure was also exerted on the Palestinians to give up their rights, which have been recognized under international law and endorsed by both the General Assembly and the Security Council, in exchange for promises to slow down Israel's abuse of those rights.

The events of the past three months prove that the security of Palestine cannot be achieved without guaranteeing the security of Israel, and vice versa. Security is indivisible and can be achieved only through a peace that respects the right of others to exist and provides a fair opportunity to live a normal life. We hope that all efforts will lead to the establishment of a peace based on mutual interests, not on a balance of power.

I now turn to the situation in Syria, which has become extremely urgent. Egypt reaffirms the need to reach a political solution through dialogue. Egypt supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in coordination with Russia and the United States, to convene the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We also commend the brave decision of the opposition to participate in the Conference. We urge opposition members not to change their minds.

We call upon both the Government and the opposition to participate seriously in developing the necessary arrangements for a transitional period that secures the territorial integrity and social cohesion of Syria, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), which was endorsed by the Security Council. We also reaffirm that the events in Syria should not divert the attention of the Security Council from implementing its resolutions on the illegality of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan, and on the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan and other Arab-occupied territories.

Before concluding, I would like to commend the efforts of Ms. Angela Kane, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Mission on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons programme. The Council has only partially implemented resolution 687 (1991) on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. It has not followed up on the implementation of paragraph 14, which noted that such actions would represent steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone freee from weapons of mass destruction.

Chemical weapons were used in Syria last August. Should we wait for another tragedy to occur before the international community seriously and impartially deals with the real sources of danger in the Middle East? Egypt has reiterated its commitment to ridding the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction, and launched an initiative in that regard on 28 September. We call on all States of the region and the five permanent members of the Security Council to respond positively to our initiative. We also call on the Secretary-General and the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to redouble their efforts to convene the long-awaited conference on declaring the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, so as to ensure that the region is free from all sources of danger for future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month and to wish the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan every success. I am also pleased to congratulate the Jordan on its membership of the Council, as well as the other new members. I wish to emphasize our absolute support for you and our preparedness to extend all possible support to bring about the success of your mission. I also thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, and wish to express my delegation's support for the statements to be made on behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

I would first like to welcome the designation of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It expresses the solidarity of the human conscience and international will with the Palestinians' rights to equity and justice. The Palestinian people have been deprived of those rights for more than six decades. Israel continues to dash the remaining hopes towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace that would end the occupation and give rise to the birth of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Peace-loving peoples still cherish the hope that solidarity with the Palestinian people will translate into a tangible reality, to be experienced by the Palestinians in security, freedom and peace, thereby fulfilling the resolutions of the Security Council. Unfortunately, they are still trampled upon by the Israeli occupation forces with no fear of any deterrence or punishment.

As we move into 2014, is it possible that we forget the hopes attached to the advent of last year, 2013, and the efforts deployed to revive negotiations to achieve a just and final resolution to the Palestinian question. Despite the impetus, endeavours and anticipation, Israel continues to flout the will of the international community, defying all international resolutions, including those adopted by the Council. We are now witnessing the expansion of the settlements, in contravention of international law. There is also the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the continuing collective punishment of the Palestinian people and the blockade against Gaza.

While the forces of the occupying Power have released some Palestinian prisoners, they have at the same time continued to detain hundreds of others, including some aged between 15 and 18 years. That is in addition to the recurrent attacks by settlers against the Palestinians. At the same time, in some cases the victims are being urged to absolve the culprits of responsibility.

The coercive policies of the occupying Power have deprived the Palestinian people of their basic right to live in peace, dignity and freedom and exercise their right to self-determination. Any attempt to hold the Palestinians responsible for the increased tensions — by resorting to the flimsy pretexts for the continuing blockade policy or for the preparations for further attacks — is completely unacceptable. No one should be deceived by such distortions of reality. The occupation is the crux of the matter. Ending the occupation will allow peace, justice and stability to prevail. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, strongly deplores the recurrent attacks and provocative actions in Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

We condemn all attempts to alter the historic and religious identity of the holy sites and call for the immediate cessation of any attempt to demographically alter East Jerusalem, including the campaign to destroy Palestinian homes, strip Palestinians of citizenship and evict them by forceful measures that violate international humanitarian law. We deplore the declaration to build 1,400 more residential units east of occupied Jerusalem and in other occupied Palestinian territories, including the construction of settlements in southern Al-Quds, which cut off historic lines of continuity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Will 2014 witness the long-awaited moment of truth, namely, the two-State solution? I recall the statement made by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, that the continuation of settlement activities does not conform with the two-State solution, as well as the statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, that the situation has become very complex in the light of Israel's continuing settlement activities. He emphasized that the United Nations cannot reconcile settlement expansion with achieving the two-State solution.

Achieving the two-State solution may be impossible. We have only to recall and heed the statements made by the Prime Minister of Israel in December 2013, that Israel would not stop, not even for one moment, its ongoing settlement project.

Saudi Arabia emphasizes the statement made on behalf of the League of Arab States and its resolution 7719 of 21 December 2013, underscoring the importance of abiding by the Arab Peace Initiative and of holding the Israeli Government responsible for hampering the progress towards peace. The resolution also called on the United States, as the sponsor of the current peace negotiations, and the other permanent members of the Security Council to compel the Israeli Government to halt settlement activities and to fully lift the blockade against Gaza. We also emphasize that final status issues, including Jerusalem, the borders, refugees, security and water, must comply with relevant United Nations resolutions and not violate any rights guaranteed by international law.

Incomplete sovereignty over any part of the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Jordan Valley region, is unacceptable. We call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, the Sheba'a farms area and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory. An agreement that is not based on justice and equality will lead to a vicious cycle of failed negotiations.

We have carefully listened to the statements noting that the decisions required by the peace process demand courage on the part of decision-makers. That does not apply selectively to one party, but not to another. It also applies to the peace process sponsor. The international community must not allow the Council's resolutions to be undermined by efforts to apply the law of force, which leads to flimsy results dictated by internal affairs and narrow-minded interests. We call for courageous leadership that demands the recognition of rights, without circumventing international law or legitimacy. In that context, justice and equity will lead to the achievement of peace.

The current situation of sisterly Syria represents the greatest humanitarian tragedy of the century. The Syrian authorities are subjecting their people to genocide, using all types of weapons, both conventional and non-conventional, including chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombings, Scud missiles and barrel bombs. The regime is antagonizing its people and cannot protect them. The international community must accelerate efforts to protect the Syrian people.

Eyewitnesses from Syria have visited the United Nations and the Council to provide testimony about acts of terrorism to which they had been subjected. It is a war of starvation and subjugation that seeks to humiliate, while fanning the fuel of sedition and sowing malcontent. They described the situations of those who are starving in Damascus, Al-Hasakah, Madamiya and Yarmouk, which contain more than 20,000 Palestinian refugees. We are wondering, as are the refugees, how it is possible for the Council to remain unable to adopt even one statement deploring the gravest violations of international humanitarian law.

We emphasize the need for foreign combatants to leave the Syrian territory. The spread of foreign armed groups is of grave concern. My delegation emphasizes the fact that States that have influence on the Syrian regime must focus such pressure on it, in order to halt the massacres and pogroms it has been perpetrating for the past three years.

My delegation appreciates the strenuous efforts undertaken by the United Nations organs to unconditionally deliver humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. The Security Council must hasten to adopt a decisive resolution on delivering humanitarian assistance to all parties in need, wherever they may be, and to impose deterrent sanctions on those who impede such actions.

We are about to convene the second Geneva Conference on Syria, based on the hope that the Secretary-General's call to convene the meeting will continue, based on the framework of the first Geneva Conference, to form a transitional Government with broad competencies covering the State facilities, including intelligence, security and political affairs sectors, and to realize the aspirations of the Syrian people and its ambitions for freedom and dignity, in a manner preserving the territorial integrity, safety and rights of the Syrians, with respect for their various factions, creeds and categories.

No one should forget the main goal of the second Geneva Conference on Syria. All those invited must agree to the requisites of the invitation and officially declare their acceptance, first and foremost to the establishment of a transitional Government. We therefore believe that inviting Iran is out of the question, in particular as it has military soldiers hidden by the regime. Its participation is thus invalid at this juncture.

The international community must not waste this opportunity saving face, and the States sponsoring the Conference and the United Nations must respond to the appeal to rescue the sisterly Syrian people. Those with the blood of the Syrian people on their hands must not participate in shaping their future. Furthermore, they must not be granted impunity for their crimes against humanity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing the first open debate of the year. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive briefing.

This debate is taking place just two days prior to the beginning of the second Geneva Conference on Syria in Montreux. The holding of the Conference and the political push that it will certainly generate are a welcome and necessary development. Brazil is ready to contribute to a positive outcome to the Conference, which should mark the opening of a dialogue between the Syrian Government and opposition groups to end the violence and to ensure that peace is fully re-established.

Brazil has consistently advocated for a peaceful solution to the current conflict and supported the launching of a Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people while preserving the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. The presence of a vibrant community of Syrian origin in Brazil only increases our interest in contributing to peace in that sister nation.

We remain convinced that an agreed transition that halts the violence in Syria is still possible. At the same time, it is also true that, had the principles and guidelines agreed upon in the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex)been put into effect earlier, the urgent task of restoring peace to a war-torn country and neighbouring areas would have been less formidable today. In Montreux, we look forward to the beginning of a process that will lead to the formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, established by mutual consent.

We underscore that the parties must create a positive atmosphere for negotiations and, having embraced the path of dialogue, reject once and for all the illusion of military victory. The Syrian Government, which has the primary responsibility in that regard, must cease all armed violence, release arbitrarily detained persons, including the more vulnerable, in particular women and children, and allow full humanitarian access to people in need. The Syrian armed opposition must shoulder its responsibilities and reciprocate and bear in mind that humanitarian obligations apply to all armed parties. There will be many obstacles, but the process must be sustained. All the relevant stakeholders should be allowed to participate, without exclusions. All must refrain from aiding and abetting extremist groups and those who wish the process to fail. The influx of weapons to all parties in Syria should cease immediately.

Brazil continues to be extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria and in neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, which have been receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees throughout the conflict. In order to mitigate that precarious and tragic humanitarian situation, Brazil has made important financial contributions, including during the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, held last week in Kuwait with great success. We have constantly urged all parties in Syria to allow full and unhindered access by humanitarian staff and assistance to the civilian population. At the same time, in line with the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, we reiterate our grave concern about the negative impact that unilateral sanctions are having on the living conditions of the Syrian people.

Brazil is deeply concerned about the increase of instability in Lebanon. There has been a series of violent acts by armed groups across Lebanon, especially in Tripoli, and terrorist bombings that caused death and injury among the population, including murdering a Brazilian citizen in Beirut. We join the Security Council in condemning those heinous crimes. The international community must keep up its support for Lebanon's State institutions, including the army, and for the fight against terrorism.

We welcome the opening, on 16 January, of the trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, nearly nine years after the attack that killed former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 21 others.

As the homeland of millions of Lebanese descendants and with a Brazilian community living in Lebanon, Brazil reiterates its readiness to help Lebanon face current challenges. Brazil fully supports the important work carried out by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which has been a key player in the promotion of stability in Lebanon and instrumental for security along the border between Lebanon and Israel.

The current instability in Iraq and the increasing number of civilian victims reinforce our perception that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through unilateral actions without Security Council authorization.

Brazil has welcomed the resumption of direct final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, in the hope that the talks will lead to the realization of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. We commend the efforts undertaken by the international community, especially by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and encourage him to continue to pursue a comprehensive peace agreement.

We regret, however, that after encouraging news regarding the release of Palestinian prisoners, the Israeli Government has announced plans for the further construction of settlement units in the Palestinian occupied territory. Those settlements are illegal and undermine the peaceful solution of the conflict. The logic of following confidence-building measures with confidence-sapping actions is detrimental to the process.

At the same time, Brazil strongly condemns the renewed rocket launches from Gaza into Israel, which are contrary to the cause of peace and only trigger more radicalization.

Brazil once again calls for the Security Council to fully carry out its responsibilities and provide support for the peace process. We also continue to expect that the Quartet will play a proactive role and report regularly to the Security Council. In that regard, a support group to the Quartet with wider geographical representation might provide badly required impetus to its activities.

We also underscore the importance of the participation of Israeli and Palestinian civil society in the creation of conditions for the success of the peace process. Brazil remains ready to support and engage in their initiatives towards reconciliation and sustainable peace. Brazil welcomes and fully supports the launch of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Finally, we are encouraged by the signing of the joint plan of action on Iran's nuclear programme by the five permanent members of the Security Council and Iran. We commend the goodwill demonstrated by Tehran in the negotiations, under the leadership of President Hassan Rouhani. We hope that the positive dialogue between the parties will lead to a comprehensive solution, the lifting of sanctions and an encompassing agreement as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also commend your initiative in choosing the theme of today's debate, namely, "The situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question", which is so important given our support for the cause. We hope for success for the current efforts as we begin the new year.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in which he highlighted the principled positions that he has consistently put forward regarding the conflict.

Our debate today coincides with the declaration adopted two days ago in Marrakesh during the twentieth session of the Al-Quds Committee, presided over by the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, and with the participation of the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas. It was an opportunity to highlight the efforts being made by His Majesty, as President of the Al-Quds Committee, and to express respect for the identity and symbolic value of Al-Quds, as well as to address all practices that are detrimental to it, including the building of settlements in that city where all inhabitants coexist. While explaining the objectives of the meeting, His Majesty stated that he wished to send a message to the entire world showing that "we are a nation that supports peace and a coalition between civilizations and cultures".

The declaration adopted at the session also reaffirms the key importance of the cause of Jerusalem for the Islamic nation, given that Jerusalem lies at the heart of a political solution and that any attempt against the Al-Aqsa mosque would lead only to an escalation of violence and increase the level of despair and could have harmful consequences for the region, which would undermine any possibility for peace.

Secondly, the Security Council was invited to remain abreast of the situation of tension in Jerusalem, given its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Thirdly, the Committee reiterated that the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East was the goal towards which all States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Group are working, consistent with international law and on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map, with a view to enabling the people of Palestine to establish their own independent, fully sovereign and geographically unified State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Fourthly, the Committee stated that the negotiations held between Palestine and Israel since July 2013 represented an important step towards achieving peace in a manner consistent with resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process. The Committee reiterated the importance of addressing any action that is contrary to the objective of peace and that could strengthen the occupation.

Great hopes have been invested in the negotiations that are being conducted with great determination by Secretary of State Kerry to carry the process forward and bring the people of the region closer to a comprehensive and just peace, in keeping with the desire of the international community as expressed in the context of the Organization since 1948.

However, the possibilities of success for the negotiations will remain slim as long Israel does not respect the need to end the occupation, allow the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and abandon the settlement policy, which we have repeatedly denounced, as it is contrary to the principles underpinning the negotiations.

Despite the experiences of the Palestinian people since 1948, including with policies of displacement and confiscation, they have always worked to pursue their inalienable rights. Their leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, has given tangible and consistent proof of their commitment to dialogue and negotiation as means of achieving peace.

Israel must shoulder its responsibilities and work in a positive and serious manner with the American mediation so that negotiations can be successful, in keeping with the resolutions adopted on the basis of the current situation, because any further failures could lead to greater extremism, violence and reprisals, which the peoples of the region cannot deal with given the current crises.

The tragic situation in Syria is deteriorating on all fronts and is now reaching the end of its third year, with all that implies in terms of victims and destruction across the entire spectrum of Syrian society. This has also affected neighbouring States, which have shown unprecedented solidarity. To express our own solidarity with the brotherly Syrian people and to alleviate the burden on neighbouring countries, the Kingdom of Morocco has established a hospital in the Zaatari camp in sisterly Jordan.

In two days, the second Geneva Conference on Syria will be a true test of the possibility of laying the foundation for political dialogue in a manner consistent with the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people, in the context of a democracy that includes all of the Syrian people and that guarantees the sovereignty and unity of sisterly Syria.

The Kingdom of Morocco stands ready to contribute, along with the Security Council and the international community, to launching a dynamic that will put an end to the bloodshed and revive hopes for a political solution so as to ensure stability.

Turning to Lebanon, the Kingdom of Morocco welcomes the policy pursued by that country. My country reiterates its support for the independence and unity of Lebanon, thereby reaffirming our belief in the ability of the Lebanese people to rise above through the difficult circumstances that they are experiencing today.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): As I take the floor in the Security Council for the first time this year, I would like to say how glad I am to see your Royal Highness presiding over the Council during the month of January, only one month after your country's election. I wish every success to Jordan and to the other newly elected Security Council members — Chad, Chile, Nigeria and Lithuania. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Today I will touch upon two issues: first, the Middle East peace process, and secondly, the situation in Syria.

First, I wish to express my heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of Israel over the sad passing of Mr. Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel.

The direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine are now entering a crucial phase. We have fewer than four months left for a deal to be made. This nine-month time frame for the negotiations had been agreed upon by both parties last year.

We would once again like to call upon both parties not to take unilateral actions that might negatively affect the peace process, but rather to continue negotiations. In that context, we deeply deplore the decision made by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction on 10 January to publish tenders to build new housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We believe that helping Palestinians create viable economic foundations will contribute to advancing the political process. Given the current phase of negotiations, it becomes all the more important for the international community to work towards the coexistence and prosperity of Palestinians and their neighbours. From that standpoint, Japan will continue with its own initiatives aimed at mobilizing private-sector investment in Palestine. As I said in this Chamber last October (see S/PV.7047), Japan is promoting two projects — the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). Today, let me focus on the CEAPAD.

CEAPAD was launched in Tokyo in February 2013, where Japan and Palestine co-hosted the Conference. In addition to the two hosts, seven countries from Asia — Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of Korea — as well as five international organizations, including the United Nations, participated. It is a process aimed at mobilizing and sharing East Asian economic development experiences and resources for the sake of Palestinian development.

As a follow-up, Japan hosted a private sector promotion meeting in Tokyo last December. Participants explored ways to strengthen the Palestinian private sector and to enhance their business relations with Palestine. The outcome of the meeting will be submitted to the second ministerial meeting of CEAPAD, scheduled to be held in Indonesia in March. We are grateful to Indonesia for hosting the Conference and we hope that it will result in tangible outcomes. For its part, at the meeting in Indonesia, Japan is planning to announce additional and substantial assistance for Palestine.

Turning to the situation in Syria, the successful conduct of the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria is of the utmost importance in moving the political process forward. Foreign Minister Kishida will represent Japan at the Conference. Japan strongly urges both the Syrian Government and the opposition parties to engage seriously and constructively in direct negotiations, with a view to putting an end to all forms of violence and establishing a transitional governing body in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

The political process needs to be sustained by international efforts designed to step up humanitarian assistance on the ground. We would like to express our appreciation to the Government of Kuwait for hosting the pledging conference for Syria on 15 January and for making a very generous pledge on that occasion. At that conference, Japan's representative announced our country's additional humanitarian assistance in the amount of $120 million. Our humanitarian assistance, including support for neighbouring countries, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, now totals $275 million.

However, humanitarian aid remains meaningless if it is not delivered to those in need. Japan therefore demands that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, take the necessary steps to ensure immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas affected by the conflict.

In addition, I would like to reiterate Japan's commitment to providing the greatest possible cooperation towards the disposal of Syria's chemical weapons. In that context, my Government has decided to contribute a total of $18 million to the trust funds established under the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing today. We congratulate Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria for assuming membership of the Security Counci. We especially thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, His Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, for presiding over the morning portion of today's meeting. I am especially pleased to see Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein preside over the Council this month.

This year is an important oner for locking in a two-State solution. Last week, on 16 January, the United Nations formally launched the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, expressing the hope that in coming months Palestine, Israel and the international community will intensify their efforts to find a lasting peace. The resumption of the peace process in August 2013 was a true blessing, but talks for the past six months have lingered on without producing any results. Let me add that even a halting process of engagement between the two sides is better than complete breakdown and estrangement.

We all hope that this year will be a year of decisions and an enduring political solution that will lead to an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel, and both sides recognizing each other's legitimate rights. I would hasten to add that vacating occupied Lebanese lands and the Syrian Golan is equally essential.

However, talks should not drag on forever; they must produce results. Decades have already been lost, and that has kept the region in a maelstrom of conflict.

To achieve results, both sides will have to move with courage and avoid steps that scuttle the talks. Four steps by the Israeli Government can stem the downslide on the ground. First, it must stop the settler attacks. Secondly, it must halt illegal settlement activity. Thirdly, it must repeal the law passed late last year that effectively annexes approximately 29 per cent of the occupied West Bank. Fourthly, it must ease the blockade of Gaza and end demolitions and displacement there and in the West Bank.

We welcome the release of Palestinian prisoners, which is an important confidence-building measure. However, prisoner releases should not be linked to the announcement of massive settlement construction and create a false quid pro quo.

We endorse the call of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to all the parties in Syria to allow free passage to the humanitarian convoys to Yermuk carrying foodstuffs and bringing medical assistance to the besieged Palestinian refugees. At the twentieth session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Al-Quds Committee, held in Marrakech last week, Pakistan once again expressed its consistent and unflinching support for the Palestinian cause and the full realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan's adviser to the Prime Minister on national security and foreign affairs, during his call on President Mahmoud Abbas, offered assistance to Palestine for capacity-building programmes and education and training in the fields of medicine, engineering and diplomacy.

This is an important week for Syria. The planned talks in Montreux come after a long and vexing waiting period. This moment is precious; it must not be squandered. The destiny of the people of Syria and peace and stability in that country will be in the hands of the Syrian interlocutors from Government and opposition. It is high time for the Syrian nNation to turn a new leaf. The latest diplomatic problems arising on the question of participation at Montreux should be resolved urgently so that the entire process is not imperilled or derailed. We should harness all the ingenuity at our disposal to salvage the talks.

The brutal Syrian conflict, which has left more than 100,000 dead and some 9 million in need of humanitarian assistance, has made one point abundantly clear — there is no military solution. The struggle to get an upper hand in the battlefield kills Syrians. It does not bring peace. It is also clear that no political solution is possible without the mutual consent of all sides. We urge all participants at the Conference in Montreux to commit to engagement and dialogue until they produce a blueprint for peace and transition.

We pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, the United States, the Russian Federation and regional Powers for investing their political capital in the Geneva process. We support the call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the immediate cessation of mass executions and killings by some armed groups committed in violation of international law.

Finally, we call on all sides in Syria to cease, or at least pause, all military operations for the duration of the Montreux talks.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership and the work you have done as President of the Council during the month of January. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The regular review of the issue of the Middle East requires us to consider the other issues that concern the region. That is even more true in the light of the ongoing challenges that threaten to destabilize it. In that light, diplomacy and dialogue appear to be the best way to achieve a long-term solution in each of the conflicts in the Middle East. Of course, each situation has unique features that preclude the use of identical formulas in all situations. In accordance with those ideas, I will briefly refer to two of the conflicts that we consider to be of particular importance: the conflict in Syria and the peace process in the Middle East.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, Guatemala believes that the first step to move forward any dialogue should be the cessation of violence, and in the Syrian conflict that premise is indisputable. For almost three years, that conflict has destroyed a people, all sense of the value of human life, and respect for human rights, all of which underscores the fact that armed struggle cannot be an option. If what both parties seek is the welfare of their people — as they have claimed on several occasions — they must also be willing to engage in a political dialogue and seek a permanent solution to their differences, including the establishment of a transition Government. That is not easy, but there is no alternative. The international community should support that commitment.

The delayed call for an international conference on Syria — which has been announced for 22 January — opens the door for dialogue. In order to seize that opportunity, however, it is necessary for both the Government and opposition groups, as well as other States that have been invited, to participate constructively. They must see it for what it is — the only way to end the violence. It is encouraging that both the Government and the opposition groups have sent signals that the effects of armed conflict may be mitigated, including the possibility of opening humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas. However, even more important is the effective and responsible participation of those who can stop the armed struggle.

With regard to the peace process in the Middle East, recent events make us question the possible outcome. The rejection of formal negotiations, the refusal to change traditional positions and, in general, the taking of unilateral decisions that undermine any progress suggest that there is little interest in or intention to reach a solution of two States living in peace under safe borders. Nevertheless, from our perspective it remains the only viable option for peace and security.

We are aware of the enormous challenges to both parties in that process, both nationally and internationally. We therefore hope that in the remaining time, the parties can work positively to meet the established deadlines. We believe that the involvement of the international community, especially the Quartet and regional actors, is essential throughout the process. Similarly, we must call on both parties to avoid all acts that could jeopardize the ongoing discussions, including the expansion of settlements. We hope that the parties can demonstrate their maturity and commitment to the principles that unite us, and minimize all the differences that hinder progress towards a peaceful solution.

In conclusion, in order to reconcile conflicting positions it is necessary to maintain a constructive dialogue. That is the only way to avoid greater evils which, if continued, will eventually undermine the stability of the entire Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to welcome, through you, Mr. President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and thank him for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today.

In their statements today, some delegations have deliberately referred to the situation in my country, Syria, in a provocative and misleading manner. They have cited a number of false allegations and accusations that only serve to support terrorism and extremism in Syria and in the region, and to divert attention from the core matter under discussion, which is how to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, and not the domestic affairs of the countries of the region. On that basis, I will not respond, under this item, to the statements of countries that support, arm, harbour, train and incite terrorists and facilitate their infiltration of Syrian territory across our borders with neighbouring States. Those statements encourage extremism and devastation in Syria and feverishly aim to thwart any possible solution to the Syrian crisis, including efforts undertaken to convene the second Geneva Conference, which the Syrian Government has agreed to participate in without preconditions.

It is well known that the United Nations bears a historical and legal responsibility for the establishment of the independent and sovereign State of Palestine. That responsibility dates to the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 1947, which partitioned Palestine, and 273 (III), which endorsed Israel's membership in the United Nations, based on its commitment to United Nations resolutions relevant to the establishment of the State of Palestine and the return of Palestinian refugees to their land. However, what happened after that was just the opposite. Fully supported militarily, politically and economically by its protectors and sponsors, Israel launched one aggression after the other against the people and States of the region, implementing an expansionist policy that resulted in occupying territories in a number of Arab countries in 1967.

Furthermore, successive Israeli Governments have perpetrated systematic and documented violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Settlement activities have always been a top priority for the policymakers of successive Israeli Governments, in spite of the fact that those activities — as recognized by everyone, including Israel's supporters — undermine the possibility of creating a contiguous and viable State of Palestine, as well as the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.

Israel has not stopped there. It has organized State terror reaching beyond the region, imposed racist laws, desecrated Islamic and Christian holy sites, expelled Palestinians from their homes and arbitrarily detained and inhumanely tortured Palestinians, including women and children, and the democratically elected leaders of the Palestinian people.

In the same context as the Israeli policies I have just mentioned, the suffering of the Syrian people under occupation in the Syrian Golan has been going on for almost half a century. Israeli settlement activities continue in the occupied Syrian Golan, where the Syrian population is subject to heinous policies of suppression, racial discrimination, detention, torture and depravation of their natural resources, including oil, gas and water. They are also deprived of the right to learn the Syrian national curriculum. Their right to carry their national identity cards is also denied. Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan receive no medical care and students are not allowed to study in Arabic or to use the Syrian national curriculum. Health workers wearing the symbol of the Syrian Red Crescent are not permitted to work in the Syrian Golan. Moreover, a separation apartheid wall is being built to the east of the Syrian city of Majdal Shams. Israel also refuses to remove mines that have been planted on Syrian territory there.

The Israeli occupying Power bears full responsibility for the consequences of its support and assistance to the terrorist group in the area of separation in the occupied Syrian Golan, in blatant violation of the disengagement agreement of 1974, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and international law. Israel's support for terrorists endangers the lives of United Nations forces and undermines their work. This has been demonstrated in reality when such terrorist groups have kidnapped UNDOF peacekeepers, fired upon them or targeted their sites. We have informed the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) of the details of those incidents and formally requested an investigation into the collusion of Qatari intelligence in the kidnapping of Filipino peacekeepers. What is surprising is that DPKO has to date failed to report on the results of that investigation, if such an investigation has even been conducted.

In the light of the documented and authenticated facts to which I have just referred, it is only natural to discuss the issue of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories on the United Nations agenda. What is strange and unacceptable, however, is that the resolutions adopted by the United Nations go unheeded by the Israeli authorities in their intransigence and total lack of will to follow up on their implementation, in addition to the irresponsible support provided by some powerful States for Israel's ongoing occupation of Arab territories, in disregard for all relevant resolutions.

The failure of the United Nations to shoulder its historical and legal responsibilities should not continue, nor should the failure to implement the relevant resolutions on ending the Israeli occupation, including resolution 497 (1981), aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan. In order to maintain what is left of the credibility of the United Nations, it is imperative that certain States end their policies of double standards and turn their words into action by forcing Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions so as to end the occupation and the unprecedented calamity to which Arab citizens have been subject for decades.

We must not delude ourselves or deny the truth. Israel is a settler entity that was established on the basis of occupation and expansion, and has never been interested in peace. It has responded to all peace initiatives and negotiations by raising such invalid pretexts as security concerns, only to enforce occupation and impose a fait accompli that cannot be changed. It has done so by building and expanding settlements, threatening Arab territories and changing historical and demographic characteristics. Any criticism of such actions makes Israel throw up its arms in protest, while any discussion of the untold suffering of the Palestinians is always controversial.

No just, lasting and comprehensive peace process in the region can be successful without honouring the well-established terms of reference, especially United Nations resolutions. Those terms of reference are the only basis for any settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, regardless of any other explanation or judgement that contradicts them and free from any Israeli attempt at extortion, bargaining or to link the peace process to other issues.

The nations of the region aspire to peace and prosperity and to ending the state of instability and tension. But Member States that have worked against the fulfilment of this goal and contributed to the creation of volatile hotspots throughout the region are nurturing the violence and fuelling regional clashes based on ethnic, sectarian and religious reason with a view to lifting international political and diplomatic pressure from Israel and to ending any hope of ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories.

I mentioned earlier that, in their approach to the situation in Syria, certain States have focused on certain issues that they consider important enough to raise in this meeting while deeming it appropriate not to discuss to the fullest the issue at hand — putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and attaching comprehensive and lasting peace. That is to say, we have been ignoring the elephant in the room.

Although all of this has been discussed, no one has spoken of the importance of fighting the international terrorism that has ravaged Syria. In scores of letters to the Security Council, we have described and detailed the many dangers posed by this terrorism. Terrorism entered our country through its north-eastern borders. However, I would like to remind everyone that it is the same terrorist group — the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant — that has struck both Iraq and Syria. This fact is well known to all. Some have condemned its activities in Iraq, but they have not been able to utter a word condemning the existence of the same terrorist organization in Syria.

It is truly shameful that hypocrisy should reach such levels, at a time when we have presented the Council with the names of hundreds of dead in Syria — Saudis, Turks, British, American, Canadians, Australians, Libyans, Tunisians and others. All those have died on Syrian territory. At a time when the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, France and other countries, including the chief of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, have admitted their fear of the return of the terrorist elements who are shedding Syrian blood in Syria to their home countries. If they continue to shed Syrian blood in Syria that is fine; but for them to return to their homelands in the West, that is a problem for them. Preferably, they should continue to shed the blood of Syrians in Syria and not return to their Western States of origin. "Kill the Syrians and let the Syrians kill you". That is the solution. "But do not come back to your capitals because you are unwanted." It is as if those terrorists left their countries wearing invisible attire and as if their Governments had no knowledge of their departure.

Turkish freight trucks sent by the Turkish Government, supposedly carrying humanitarian assistance to Syria, were stopped by coincidence on Syrian territory by the police. It turned out that they were filled with weapons, and not with medication, milk for infants or warm clothes for the refugees. No, they were filled with weapons. However, those weapons, according to the Turkish Government, are humanitarian assistance. Those freight trucks were stopped. When they were searched and the weapons discovered, the Head of the Turkish Government laid off hundreds of police officers, judges and other people involved because they uncovered this deceptive action at the Yarmouk refugee camp, the home of Palestinian refugees — our brothers, our sisters — until a decision is made by the United Nations for a return to their occupied territories.

The same delegations have ignored the declaration from Damascus by Palestinian Minister of Labour Ahmed Majdalani that terrorists, Islamists and religious people, financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatari intelligence, are the ones who fired against the convoy of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that was attempting to enter the refugee camp. The Director of UNRWA was there, as was the Palestinian Ambassador to Damascus and the Palestinian Minister of Security, and they were all witnesses to the firing on the assistance convoy attempting to enter the Yarmouk refugee camp.

There is much to be said. However, I will not delve into further details, as the subject under discussion is that of the question of Palestine and of putting an end to the Israeli occupation. If some Arabs are going to please Israel by their actions, I will not do the same.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers, Mr. President, in commending you for convening this important debate. I wish to express my personal pleasure at seeing you presiding over this body.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The year 2014 will be a critical one for the Middle East. We made a good start by launching the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on 16 January, and the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to open in Montreux. We hope that the launch of the International Year will generate further support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and, with it, statehood for the Palestinians.

We are encouraged by the diplomatic engagement by the international community. Peace negotiations need to be conducted expeditiously and be consistent with the principles of international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. As has been stated during this debate, we also believe that the cost of failing to reach a peace accord could very well bring another round of serious violence, with tragic consequences. We hope that the parties concerned will not let go of this opportunity to achieve a sustainable peace when there is much international goodwill supporting the process.

The ongoing settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, need to end at the earliest possible date for a sustainable solution in that region.

The situation of the blockade of the Gaza strip is an obstacle to the peace process. The recent floods, which displaced approximately 10,000 people, inflicted extra misery on a population already under strain. Gaza is also suffering from serious fuel and power shortages. Although partially relaxed, there is an urgent humanitarian need to lift more comprehensively the restrictions on imports of essential supplies of food and medicines and construction material. We reiterate the call for the full implementation of the resolution 1860 (2009), and underline our strong support for the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The security needs of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples must also be respected. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians will only enhance feelings of suspicion and insecurity and widen the gap between the parties. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

We welcome the recent release of long-term Palestinian prisoners by Israel, which will contribute positively to the ongoing negotiation process. We also hope that the issue of the detention of children, which is linked to broader, long-standing concerns regarding the detention of Palestinians, will be urgently addressed.

The President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, during his recent visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan, reiterated his strong hope for a peaceful and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question and an independent Palestinian State. He was particularly encouraged to observe that the people of Palestine are persevering with determination, in the midst of much hardship, to realize their goal of statehood. Agreements were signed between Sri Lanka and Palestine to establish a Sri Lanka-Palestine Joint Commission and a vocational training centre.

Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Sri Lanka is hopeful that both Israel and Palestine will utilize the opportunities presented during this year to achieve a historic peace agreement in the interest of their future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by expressing our sincere thanks to you for convening this open debate. My appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

I wish to associate my statement with the statements to be delivered later by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Djibouti on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

We gather today at a time when trepidation remains persistent in the Middle East and the weapons are far from silent, but when there is genuine hope in the hearts of all men and women who care about Palestine and about peace that remarkable progress can be made in 2014.

We are pleased to recall that you, Mr. President, assured us last week at the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that the Palestinian question remained not only a priority for the Council but was also its greatest test. It is the strong belief of Indonesia that the ability of the Council to pass that test and bring about a permanent solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will not only elevate its stature but also set a positive example with regard to all the other challenges it confronts. The question is whether the Council has the political will and courage.

The pursuit of peace is now even more important following the overwhelming decision of the General Assembly last year to designate 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On that subject, Indonesia welcomes the continuous efforts of the United States Secretary of State to convince the relevant parties to move forward towards a firm and lasting resolution.

Other issues concerning the Palestinian people that Indonesia would like to highlight today are social and humanitarian issues. We note with dismay continued Israeli practices that contravene its responsibilities as the occupying Power. Israel remains persistent in its violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people. While we welcome Israel's recent freeing of 104 prisoners, it is deeply perturbing to know that it still detains hundreds of Palestinian children, including those below 16 years of age. Indonesia is also saddened to learn that thousands of Palestinians are still languishing in Israeli prisons, suffering in poor conditions and lacking medical facilities.

Indonesia is appalled to learn of Israeli policies involving the destruction of wells and water infrastructure during military operations, thereby denying many Palestinians access to clean water. We also demand that Israel take the necessary measures to prevent Israeli settlers from attacking Palestinians and from desecrating religious sites in the City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Indonesia remains steadfast in its belief that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is itself a violation of international law and international human rights law. Accordingly, we join other States to demand that Israel make the best use of the remaining three-month period of negotiation to rectify its illegal actions and start respecting the will of the international community.

Indonesia reiterates its support of the road map of the Quartet and the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and under the parameters established in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the road map of the Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, the three phases of the Madrid road map and the principle of land for peace. We believe that the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only way to set things right for the Palestinian people. To that end, we again call upon Israel to resist the constant temptation to ignore the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians concerning the core issues of settlements, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, security and permanent borders.

Disappointingly, Israel continues to ignore the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the resolution of the General Assembly concerning its illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, including in and around occupied Jerusalem. Israel has no right to separate Palestinians from Palestinians, and Palestinians from their land. Their illegal settlement policy remains the biggest obstruction to peace in the Middle East.

Indonesia's support for the Palestinian people is unwavering. With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to announce that Indonesia will host the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development later this year. The Conference, which the Government of Japan initiated last year, will reinforce various existing initiatives aimed at bolstering Palestinian development.

I should now like to turn to the issue of Syria. For more than two years, an extreme humanitarian tragedy has unfolded in Syria. Death, destruction, displacement and misery persist despite the strong words that have been spoken and appeals that have been made at various Security Council meetings. It is time for members of the Council to set aside their political differences and work together earnestly in the cause of peace. The Council must underline its relevance by using its authority to enforce peace, partly by ensuring that its decisions are implemented by the parties concerned.

Indonesia reiterates that the conflict in Syria must stop immediately. All parties must cease acts of violence and hostility, uphold international humanitarian law and ensure unfettered and safe humanitarian access for those in need. Accordingly, Indonesia welcomes the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which is scheduled to take place within a few days. Our fervent hope is that all parties to the Syrian conflict will heed the appeal of the international community and participate in the Conference in good faith. We believe that an inclusive political process that reflects the wishes of all Syrians is the only possible way to reach peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Jordan, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January.

I also wish to associate myself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We take this opportunity, in conjunction with the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to reiterate our support for the State of Palestine. The launch of the International Year of Solidarity, last week, only strengthens the legitimacy of the Palestinian people's struggle against the illegal occupation by Israel. Yet the question of Palestine remains unresolved on the agenda of the Council. What we have observed so far only emphasizes that a just and lasting solution is long overdue.

Malaysia reiterates its commitment to the realization of a two-State solution based on the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. We continue to call on all parties to live up to their obligations under internationally recognized initiatives such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Oslo Accords, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We further recognize the tireless efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to facilitate the resumption of direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel.

However, instead of adhering to the principles of the initiatives I have just mentioned, Israel continues its defiance against the wishes of the international community. Secretary Kerry's efforts have been met with ridicule by Israel, while European Union Ambassadors to Israel have been summoned for rightly speaking out against illegal settlements.

It is clear to us that this intransigence will lead to the failure of the talks, which already appear to us to be one-sided against Palestine. The discussions on core issues must not be compromised or delayed. We fear that the window of opportunity for a peaceful solution is in danger of closing altogether, as the occupying Power has proven it is unwilling to meet all its commitments. In that regard, Malaysia strongly condemns the announcement of new settlement activities by Israel, and we demand a resolute end to that continued illegal practice. Settler violence against Palestinians, including destroying their agricultural land and places of worship, continues unabated.

Malaysia also remains gravely concerned by the situation in Gaza, where the illegal blockade continues to suppress the lives of its citizens. The escalation of Israel's military activities in recent days further threatens to exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation. The food and energy security needs of the people remain at critical levels, while farmers and fishermen in the security zone are denied their livelihoods by the occupying Power. As Vice-Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Malaysia has seen and heard more than enough evidence of that oppression. We call for an immediate end to the blockade, as well as all other illegal Israeli practices in the Gaza Strip.

Let me now turn to the situation in Syria, where the international community faces an ever-increasing humanitarian crisis. As a demonstration of our concern, Malaysia participated in the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria last week in Kuwait, where we pledged $500,000. We continue to urge all parties to end the violence and human rights violations, including against innocent civilians. While we welcome the recent delivery of aid to Palestinian refugees in camps of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Yarmouk, we remain particularly concerned that they continue to face unbearable human suffering. All responsible parties must allow for the appropriate measures to be taken to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided to those desperately in need.

In two days, the long-awaited second Geneva Conference on Syria will commence to follow up on the 30 June 2012 communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Malaysia remains supportive of the efforts of the Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and calls on all parties to come together to work towards a political solution that is Syrian-led and inclusive. We hope that the parties concerned will be able to put aside their differences in order to ensure a viable and sustainable outcome that will benefit the people of Syria.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, Malaysia reiterates its objections to Israel's actions, including the construction and expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan, which violate international law and the United Nations Charter. In that regard, Malaysia calls for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan, in line with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The spillover effects of the Syrian conflict to Lebanon continue to escalate. Malaysia urges the parties involved in that conflict to cease cross-border fire and other violence. My delegation also reiterates that Israel must cease its violations of Lebanese sovereignty and other hostilities, and withdraw its troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line, in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, Malaysia underlines its firm belief in a moderate approach to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, which can bridge differences and restore stability to the Middle East. Whether in the Palestine-Israeli negotiations or the streets of Beirut, or even at the negotiating table at the second Geneva Conference, the voices of moderation must prevail over the voices of those who espouse hate, ignorance, violence and extremism. We should summon the collective political will to commit to a moderate course, which will secure greater gains than if we were divided by conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to start by conveying my congratulations to all the new members of the Security Council — Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria — and would like to congratulate the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan upon your assumption of the presidency, Sir, to preside over the work of the Security Council this month. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today.

My country's delegation wishes to align itself with the statement to be delievered by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I should like to add the following points.

First, Tunisia wishes to reiterate its firm position in favour of the legitimate aspirations and yearnings of the Palestinian people to realize their liberty, freedom, dignity throughout the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, in the framework of the two-State solution pursuant to the Arab Peace Initiative, the resolutions on land for peace and the Madrid agreements. We reiterate the importance of the Palestinian issue as part of the Middle East as a whole and that continuing to work for historic justice for the Palestinian people, which has evaded them for the past four decades, is the reason for all the tension and conflicts that have wracked the region.

Second, my delegation therefore wishes to stress that the year 2014 should be one of solidarity with the Palestinian people, in the search for a fair, comprehensive and lasting solution to the issue of Palestine so that peace and security prevail in a lasting way throughout the region.

Third, convinced as we are that there is no other solution than that of peace, that should happen through new prospects being opened up for the people of the region. For that reason, we support the negotiations under way between the Palestinians and Israelis under the aegis of the United Nations. We hope that the negotiations will achieve a fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, enabling the Palestinian people to again enjoy their full rights, ending the occupation by Israel of Palestinian occupied territories and resolving a number of other issues, such as borders, security, East Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and the fate of Palestinian detainees.

Fourth, my Government places on Israel the responsibility for the obstacles to peace — by way of provocative statements, the actions of the occupation forces and of Israeli settlers targeted at Palestinian citizens, and the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, and especially in East Jerusalem.

Tunisia condemns the repeated aggression in Jerusalem targeted at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In that regard, we reiterate the statement at the end of the twentieth session of the Jerusalem Committee, which took place on 15 and 16 January. We also condemn Israeli practices aimed at changing the very identify of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We encourage the international community assume its responsibilities vis-à-vis Jerusalem.

Fifth, we wish to point out the danger inherent in the practices and violations that run counter to international law and international legality. We call on the international community, including the United States, the sponsors of the negotiations currently under way and the members of the Quartet and the Security Council as a whole, to prompt Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to those practices and end its settlement activities, which are the main obstacle to the peace process, so as to ensure that we do not lose the historic opportunity of these negotiations, which should enable us to reach a lasting settlement regarding all outstanding issues.

Sixth, we reiterate the importance of lifting the blockade that is asphyxiating Gaza, putting an end to the very serious consequences that stem from it and which deprive the Palestinian people of the necessities of daily life. Especially affected by this are women and children.

Seventh, my country also wishes to reiterate the importance of putting an end to Israeli incursions into Syrian and Lebanese territories.

Eighth, we express our concern regarding the situation in the sisterly State of Syria and its impact on neighbouring States at the humanitarian level. In that respect, we reiterate our support for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to achieve a political settlement of the crisis through an agreement among all Syrian parties to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, to ensure that they are able to achieve their yearning for freedom and democracy while preserving Syria's sovereignty and unity.

Ninth, Tunisia would like to reiterate its firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons during the conflict under way in Syria. We urge that those responsible for those crimes be brought to justice. In that regard, we welcome the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons aimed at putting an end to the use of such weapons. My delegation hopes that this will serve as a positive step towards convening an international conference on the Middle East becoming a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as soon as possible, in order to promote peace and stability in the region and around the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): At the outset, allow me to express our sincere congratulations to Jordan for its membership in the Security Council for the 2014-2015 term and its presidency of the Council for the month of January. My delegation has full confidence that Jordan will make a significant contribution to the work of the Council in the coming two years.

The year 2013 was another year that regrettably ended without any concrete advancement towards bringing an end to the oldest conflict in the Middle East. Sadly, we continued to recite over and over again the litany of unacceptable settlement and demolition activities; acts of settler violence; violations of the basic rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territory; provocations against religious and holy sites, including the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque; the continuation of the illegal embargo and the construction of the separation wall in defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions; and the most regrettable loss of lives and injuries on both sides.

However, the initiative and dedicated efforts of United States Secretary of State Kerry encouraged us to welcome 2014 with optimism for a genuine chance that would lead to the two-State solution, which we have long yearned for.

Turkey sincerely supports the ongoing talks between Israel and Palestine towards a just, comprehensive and lasting resolution based on the concept of two States, living side-by-side within the pre-1967 borders in peace and security, through a just settlement of all final-status issues on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

However, in order to achieve that most-desired outcome, the parties must refrain from actions that undermine the negotiations. At a period when we need to foster confidence-building measures, each and every step taken should be well-planned and taken with caution. For instance, the systematic coupling of prisoner releases with new settlement announcements is not helpful if the parties are sincere about the process.

The basic prerequisite for progress in the peace process is to fully understand the linkage between security and a just peace. Only a just and comprehensive settlement to the conflict will provide a true, lasting peace and a secure, stable and prosperous Middle East. Meanwhile, the responsibility on the shoulders of the international community has not lessened. We will all be morally accountable if this window of opportunity for peace once again slips away.

The General Assembly has proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This should be a year for all of us to mobilize our means and capabilities to support Palestine in the economic and political realms. A politically and economically strong Palestine will surely be a stronger partner for Israel and the entire neighbourhood for years to come. Turkey therefore supports the inalienable right of the State of Palestine to sit among us, under this roof, as an equal Member of the United Nations and fully recognized by the international community. Needless to say, Palestinian reconciliation constitutes an integral part of that strength.

For our part, Turkey will continue to do its best in alleviating the difficulties of the Palestinian people through various multilateral and bilateral projects in Palestine. Two recent examples have been the transfer of $850,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to be used in the provision of fuel for generators for critical service sectors such as health, water and sanitation in Gaza, and the launching of the Jenin Industrial Zone Project, in the West Bank, which aims at creating business and employment opportunities for the Palestinians in the area.

However, those initiatives can yield effective results only in an economy that is functioning at full capacity, where there are no restrictions on the access of goods and labour. Movements in and out of Palestine and the contiguity between Gaza and the West Bank are of vital importance. We therefore call once again for an immediate lifting of the embargo on Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and the ceasefire commitments of November 2012. The recent flexibility extended for access for materials for United

Nations projects is welcomed by many, but declared not enough by many more, considering in particular the damage caused by the recent severe weather conditions in the region.

Another source of optimism is the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria, wherein the countries invited and representatives of the European Union, Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, together with United Nations officials, will try to boost the chances for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, based on the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). Turkey looks forward to a genuine process, through the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers by the mutual consent of the two parties.

However, just as important as the commencement of the Conference is the grim reality on the ground in Syria, where innocent people continue to be killed every day by bullets, indiscriminate aerial bombardments, ballistic missiles and, last but not least, epidemic diseases and hunger while under siege. The recent wave of escalating attacks against Aleppo is extremely worrisome. That brutality must end. There should be an immediate end to the hostilities and violence, and the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) should be implemented immediately in its entirety. Reports of the eventual access of the humanitarian convoy to Yarmouk is only partially comforting, as we know that it is not a long-term remedy. Sadly, there are still hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who have yet to be reached.

On the other hand, the burden of the humanitarian crisis on neighbouring countries has reached intolerable levels, posing a threat to not only domestic but also regional instability. We would recall that the Governments of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in a meeting that took place in Sanliurfa, Turkey, on 17 January, appealed once again to the international community to boost solidarity with countries in the region hosting the majority of refugees fleeing Syria. We call once again on the Security Council to devise an effective strategy under Chapter VII to end this, the biggest humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century.

Despite the full mobilization of the international community to implement resolution 2118 (2013), the first benchmark for the elimination of the chemical weapons declared by the Syrian regime has not been met. That is not acceptable. As we have legitimate security and environmental concerns, we shall continue to closely monitor the timetable devised by the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We would also like to take this opportunity to underline once again that paragraph 4 of resolution 2118 (2013) envisages the complete destruction of Syria' chemical-weapons programme.

I must clarify the facts regarding one particular accusation by one speaker. Recently, Turkish authorities confiscated material allegedly bound for Syria. Those incidents are a testimony to Turkey's commitment to international norms and is proof that Turkey is a State governed by the rule of law. Investigations are being carried out accordingly. Having said that, Turkey will stand by the Syrian people, and its humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people will continue.

While the Middle East is going through a turbulent period, we may well be within reach of putting an end to the long-term Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is time for us all to work together to achieve that goal and for both parties to show the necessary leadership and political will to prevent a failure, which we may not be able to afford.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Sheikha Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your delegation on your election as a member of the Security Council and on your assumption to the presidency of the Council for this month. I wish you every success. By the same token, I would like to congratulate the other Member States that acceded to the Council this year and to thank the outgoing members. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing this morning.

Today we are discussing the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, in the light of international impetus resulting from the efforts of the American Administration to reconcile Palestinian and Israeli viewpoints and to reach an agreement between Palestine and Israel. The peace process is the best way to achieve stability in the region. The question of Palestine is a critical issue for all Arabs. Qatar and all Arab States reiterate the Arab commitment and the basis and principles set out in the Arab Peace Initiative to achieve the comprehensive peace in the region to which they aspire. It is important that any agreement recognize Palestinian national rights and be based on putting an end to the occupation, the achievement of self-determination, the restoration of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, and withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. It must also underscore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In that connection, we would like to state that, in order for any agreement to succeed, Israel must refrain from threatening the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State. We would like to reiterate our warning with regard to the consequences of Israeli policies that are an obstacle to peace. Such policies include in particular its fait accompli strategy, its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the use or threat of use of force, the exploitation of Palestinian national resources, especially water, the continuing detention of Palestinians, the demolition of homes and villages, expulsions, the ongoing attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the blockade on Gaza. We underscore the need for the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights and we continue to express our solidarity with the Palestinians. That people's acquisition of their national rights is a precondition for the settlement and peace to which we aspire.

We would also like to emphasize the need for Palestinian national reconciliation on the basis of the Doha and Cairo agreements. The international community must pave the way for achieving such a reconciliation.

The beginning of a new year in the Syrian revolution doubtless provides the opportunity to pause and reflect on the grave human rights violations and war crimes perpetrated by the regime with impunity. According to international organizations and human rights groups, the Syrian Government has used chemical weapons and taken the lives of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians at the hands of the regime and its loyal militia.

Is it possible that some people still listen to the claims of that regime? We help to combat terrorism and must remember some facts. As the new year begins, the Syrian regime is continuing its indiscriminate bombing of civilians and its criminal bombardment of Aleppo, discharging barrel bombs on densely populated areas and schools. The number of victims of barrel bombs exceeds the total of chemical weapons victims. The Syrian regime continues to besiege hundreds of thousands of people and to pursue a policy of starvation to death. It impedes access to humanitarian assistance. There is also the deadly blockade of the Palestinians in the Yarmouk camp. More than 40 children, women and elderly people are dying of starvation. Is that part of fighting terrorism or terrorism itself?

Syrian refugees continue to flood into neighbouring States. We thank Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and all neighbouring States for their efforts to alleviate the suffering of Syrian refugees. The international community must continue to provide assistance to those countries. I would also like to thank the Government of Kuwait and the Secretariat for having convened the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria.

The events in Syria require the international community, including the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities in the face of this unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, which has led to louder voices calling for further pressure and the adoption of a decisive resolution so as to stem the suffering of the Syrian people, put an end to the criminal actions and bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice. The convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria requires the international community to assume its responsibility in achieving the aspiration of the Syrian people for freedom and decent living conditions. We hope that the Geneva conference will find a solution. The Syrian regime must not be allowed to mark time and continue its war of genocide against the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: As this is the first time that I speak in the Council under your presidency, Sir, let me begin by congratulating you on having assumed this high office.

In the interest of time, I will read out a slightly abridged version of what we had prepared. The full text will be circulated to delegations.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union fully supports the peace conference on Syria that will take place on 22 January in Switzerland. The second Geneva Conference on Syria should be the first step in a process that leads to a political solution to the conflict. The only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and on preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We commend the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi and his team.

The objective of the Conference is the formation by mutual consent of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, including over security, the military and intelligence. Any elections in Syria should take place only within the framework of the Geneva communiqué. The regime as well as the opposition must commit themselves to the full implementation of the communiqué as a matter of urgency and demonstrate that commitment through their actions. The European Union calls on all parties to engage constructively in a genuine negotiation.

The European Union welcomes the invitation sent by the Secretary-General to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. The EU stands ready to assist the opposition delegation, led by the National Coalition, in needs that might arise as part of the negotiation.

The European Union considers it important throughout the Geneva process to also work on promoting confidence-building measures that directly benefit the local population. We remain gravely concerned about the continuing and indiscriminate bloodshed among the civilian population and call for the cessation of all violence to allow urgent humanitarian access on the ground. We strongly condemn the regime's escalating indiscriminate attacks, notably in Aleppo. The European Union shares the growing concern about the spread of extremism and extremist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Their involvement in the conflict poses a threat to the peace process, the territorial integrity of Syria and to regional and international security. The European Union welcomes the Syrian opposition coalition's condemnation of all forms of terrorism and extremism, and the fact that the moderate opposition is opposing extremist groups.

All efforts must be channelled towards the common goal of rebuilding the country, rid it of its authoritarian past, preserve its traditions of interreligious, inter-ethnic and cultural coexistence, and ensure full respect for all human rights. The European Union is concerned about the plight of all vulnerable groups and ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians.

The European Union has consistently supported civil society groups. Member States have also provided assistance and capacity-building, including through recent events such as the Cordoba conference, and will continue to do so throughout the Geneva process.

The European Union stresses the importance of an inclusive Syrian peace process and supports the active and meaningful participation of women and civil society in the overall political transition process. We encourage both parties to appoint women to their delegations to the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We also call upon the United Nations to facilitate the participation of women's groups and civil society organizations in Geneva. In that context, we also welcome the meeting on the theme "Promoting women's engagement in the Syrian political process," convened by UN-Women and the Netherlands on 12 and 13 January.

The European Union will continue to defend human rights and will remain active in ensuring accountability for the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria. The European Union reiterates its call to the Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in those aspects, including on a possible referral to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the letter from the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the Secretary-General of 14 January 2013 (S/2013/19, annex). We recall that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable, and reaffirm our support to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, established by the Human Rights Council.

Following the second Kuwait donors conference, on 15 January, where the European Union and its member States pledged €550 million, the Union will continue to urge progress and engage its partners in the framework of the United Nations-led high-level group on humanitarian challenges. We call on all the parties to the Syrian conflict, in particular the Syrian Government, to immediately implement in full the provisions of the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). Considering the unprecedented scale and nature of the crisis, we call for a humanitarian resolution by the Security Council.

The European Union urges all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian Government, which has the greatest responsibility in enabling humanitarian access, to take decisive steps to facilitate safe, unhindered and immediate access to all people in need, including those in besieged areas, through the most effective ways, including across conflict lines and borders, and to protect aid and medical workers and health facilities. We will continue the ongoing efforts to support Syrians affected by the conflict inside and outside Syria, as well as the hosting communities and governmental institutions of Syria's neighbours that have courageously welcomed refugees.

We welcome the start of the transfer of chemicals from Syria for destruction outside the country, but much remains to be done, including the actual destruction of the chemicals. Therefore, that step must be followed by swift and decisive action by the Government of Syria to meet all its obligations and commitments under resolution 2118 (2013) and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council decisions. We have provided assistance to the joint mission and to the OPCW trust fund. We will continue to give financial, political and logistical support. We would also like to emphasize the responsibility of the Syrian authorities to cover the costs associated with the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile.

The European Union calls on all foreign fighters in Syria, including Hizbullah, to withdraw immediately.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, the European Union commends the leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu and fully supports the tireless efforts by United States Secretary of State John Kerry. The European Union recalls previous European Union Council conclusions that laid forth its vision for a two-State solution resulting in an agreement on all final-status issues, ending all claims and fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of both parties. The European Union stands ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements for ensuring the sustainability of a peace agreement.

We have decided that we will provide an unprecedented package of European political, economic and security support to both parties in the context of a final status agreement. In the event of a final peace agreement, the European Union will offer Israel and the future State of Palestine a special privileged partnership, including increased access to European markets, closer cultural and scientific links, the facilitation of trade and investments, as well as the promotion of business-to-business relations. Enhanced political dialogue and security cooperation will also be offered to both States. In case of peace, the European Union envisions a future relationship between itself and the two parties that will not only deepen the bilateral ties between the Union and the two States; it will also help develop a positive interdependence and a new mutually beneficial peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine.

The European Union is convinced of the positive role that countries in the region can play in advancing the peace process, and remains committed to its ongoing dialogue with the Arab States, including with regard to achieving peace in the Middle East. The European Union reiterates the strategic importance of the Arab Peace Initiative for all parties and for the entire region. The current negotiations represent a unique opportunity that must be seized for both parties to implement a two-State solution. A one-State reality would not be compatible with the legitimate, sovereign and democratic aspirations of any of the parties.

It is important to increase mutual trust between the two parties. Actions that undermine the negotiations and diminish the trust between the negotiation partners should be avoided at any cost. In that regard, the European Union deplores Israel's continuous expansion of settlements, which are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. The European Union also expresses its grave concern regarding incitement, incidents of violence in the occupied territory, house demolitions and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The European Union expresses its serious concern about actions that undermine the status quo of the holy sites, including in Jerusalem. The European Union will continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time that Cuba takes the floor this year, we wish to congratulate all the new members of the Security Council. We also commend the presidency's initiative to convene this debate.

Cuba supports the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to draw the attention of the international community owing to the various events in the region in the course of the past year and the long-standing hope for concluding a peace process. The Security Council's consideration of this matter has been extremely protracted, and the major problems remain, especially the question of Palestine. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories constitutes the main obstacle to achieving peace and a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East.

It is imperative that the Security Council play its due role in defence of international peace and security, adopting concrete, practical measures to bring Israel to put an end to its acts of aggression against the Palestinian people.

Israel's actions deliberately contravene resolutions of the United Nations, pose a threat to regional and international peace and security and violate the human rights of an entire people. There will never be peace in the Middle East as long as such aggression continues and the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are not upheld and taken into account.

The General Assembly took a historic decision when its members granted Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the United Nations. Cuba supported that decision, in keeping with its historical position in support of the cause of the Palestinian people and in favour of their rights. Cuba reiterates its support for Palestine's entry as a full State Member of the United Nations. The Security Council must consider and approve, without further delay, the request submitted by Palestine in 2011 to be recognized as a United Nations State Member.

The news over the past year on the return to negotiations between Israel and Palestine was encouraging. But that optimism has been cautious, as the Palestinian cause and peace in the region need to be attained through fair agreements that do not undermine the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Support must continue to be given to the Palestinian people in its legitimate claim for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba demands that Israel comply with international law and put an end to its occupation of all Arab territories. We reiterate once again our position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

The Palestinian people suffer as a result of the growing number of illegal Israeli settlements, the harsh and distressing reality of Palestinian prisoners and the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the besieged Gaza Strip, where residents' living conditions have further deteriorated as the unjust blockade has been maintained. Only by ending that colonialist policy, releasing Palestinian prisoners and lifting the blockade against the Gaza Strip would allow for a meaningful political process to take off and bring peace to the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in its just struggle for self-determination and welcomes the declaration of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We hope that that decision will mark a historic watershed in the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including its full-fledged membership in the United Nations.

Cuba continues to closely follow the situation in Syria and its international repercussions. We share the concern at the loss of innocent lives in Syria, as in any other part of the world. We likewise condemn all acts of violence taking place in that country against the innocent civilian population, perpetrated by any of the parties to that conflict.

We reject all attempts to turn the alleged protection of human lives into a pretext for foreign intervention, whether directly or through support to ad hoc armed groups, including the use of mercenaries, which can only lead to destruction and augment the death toll.

We also condemn any use of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. We are strongly committed to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, as well as to strict compliance with its provisions. We welcome Syria's joining of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the agreements reached on the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile.

Likewise, we welcome the progress made in implementing the agreement for the destruction and verification of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme and the cooperation provided by the Syrian Government to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations joint mission.

The obligation of the Security Council is to promote peace and bring an end to violence; to prevent destabilization, prevent the financing, support and training of destabilizing actors; and to protect innocent people and prevent their manipulation for geopolitical ends. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

Cuba opposes calls promoting regime change in Syria and supporting the use of force and violence instead of contributing to dialogue and negotiation among all of the parties. We also reject the complicity of the mass media, committing its customary distortion of reality with no need to face the consequences of its actions.

We reiterate the call to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and the right to self-determination of its people, without any kind of foreign interference or intervention. We call for the conflict to be settled diplomatically without further bloodshed.

We join international aspirations by investing our hopes in the prospect of the second Geneva Conference on Syria leading via dialogue to agreements ending the conflict in Syria, through a peaceful process led by the Syrian people in exercise of its legitimate right to self-determination.

Cuba reiterates its condemnation of all acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, by whosoever committed, including States. In that regard, Cuba condemns all acts of terrorism perpetrated in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Naanda (Namibia): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's election to serve on the Security Council for the period 2014 to 2015, and upon your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January 2014. Equally, I wish to thank you for having organized this first open debate of 2014 on the Middle East, which affords the wider membership an opportunity to participate in these important deliberations. As 2014 has been declared the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we look forward to participating in similar forums aiming to resolve the fragile security situation in the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine.

At the same time, I wish to congratulate the newly elected members of the Security Council and to extend my delegation's support to them during their tenure on this body.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We remain convinced that the main political problem in the Middle East is the systematic aggression by Israel against Palestine. That continues to pose a threat to peace and security in the region. Namibia remains concerned about the critical situation and the continued illegal Israeli settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which continues to gravely undermine the integrity of the State of Palestine and threatens to make impossible the achievement of the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Of great concern to my delegation is the increasing number of Israeli settlements, which is based on an illegal colonizing policy that has resulted in the blockade of the Gaza Strip, restricted access for much-needed goods, humanitarian aid, medical supplies and fuel. The sustained Israeli occupation severely affects the socioeconomic well-being of the Palestinians, which is a flagrant denial of their right to self-determination and of their exercise of their fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Namibia believes that Israel's continuing flagrant contempt for international law demands urgent attention and responsible action by the international community, with a view to compelling the occupying Power to end all such grave breaches and salvaging the prospects for a peaceful solution in the Middle East region.

As a country that experienced similar illegal occupation by the South African apartheid regime, Namibia continues to persistently extend its steadfast support for the Palestinian people in pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination, independence and freedom. We will remain committed to that noble course. In that context, Namibia welcomes the proclamation by the General Assembly of the year 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with resolution 68/12 of 26 November 2013. We are hopeful that the observance of this year as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People will help bring an end to the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine, with full sovereignty and East Jerusalem as its capital.

We wish to remind the Council of its obligations to furthering the just cause of the People of Palestine by adopting practical measures to end Israeli abuses and illegal policies against the Palestinian people. It is incomprehensible that the question of Palestine remains a permanent agenda item on the Council's programme of work, considering that the General Assembly, the most representative organ of the United Nations, adopted a historic decision in 2012 by according Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. We remain hopeful that this decision will constitute an important step towards the eventual accession of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member State. It is therefore important for the Council to respect the wish of the international community by considering and approving, without further delay, the request made by Palestine for recognition as a full-fledged Member State, taking its rightful place among the community of nations.

Namibia continues to believe that a real and lasting solution leading to the freedom of Palestine can be realized only through the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the United Nations regarding the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only by addressing the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel, the creation of the Palestinian State, ending all conflicts and bringing lasting peace and security to Palestinians and Israelis alike and to the wider region.

Let me reiterate Namibia's strong support for the ongoing peace process and our appeal to both parties to commit themselves to and embrace this opportunity by abiding by their previous agreements and obligations concerning lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, living side by side.

Let me conclude by further reiterating Namibia's unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just cause for freedom, independence and social justice, and Namibia's steadfast support for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Miss Hassan (Djibouti): My delegation is honoured and pleased to take the floor on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

This important meeting is being held at a time when the question of Palestine is yet again at a very critical juncture. Our hopes for reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine were raised following the recent resumption of peace talks, which definitely requires the strong support of us all to ensure the advancement and attainment of their goals, in conformity with the parametres defined by relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

However, it is unfortunate that, in spite of those positive developments, conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, are still deteriorating as Israel continues its colonization of Palestinian land, including through Israeli settler terrorism, the arrest and detention of Palestinian civilians, and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip with an illegal blockade.

Israeli colonial settlement activities, which have manifestly escalated recently, remain the core challenge to making genuine progress in the peace negotiations. The matter needs to be seriously addressed by the international community if we are to salvage that solution and work towards peace. In that regard, we reaffirm that the continuation of building and expanding Israeli colonial settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem, undermine the territorial integrity, viability and contiguity of the Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and are clearly illegal acts that constitute a flagrant violation of international laws, resolutions and covenants, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In contradiction with United Nations resolutions and the peace process, Israel continues to defy the will of the international community by creating de facto realities on the ground, aimed at altering the Arab character, status and demographic composition of occupied East Jerusalem, with a view to isolating the city from its natural Palestinian environs. All of Israel's unlawful activities — inter alia, settlement activities, forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians, restricting Palestinians' access to places of worship, building the apartheid wall, confiscating Palestinian lands, desecrating Islamic and Christian holy sites, and closing Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem — must be brought to an immediate halt.

We must also draw the Council's attention to the constant incitement by extremist Israelis at holy sites, particularly at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem. Such provocative, illegal actions are aggravating religious tensions and risk fuelling religious conflict. In that regard, we forewarn that the continuation of all such Israeli violations will lead to eliminating any chance to realize peace and eventually threaten to further destabilize the already fragile situation in the Middle East.

At the same time, the OIC reiterates its firm commitment to the rights of the Palestinian people in East Jerusalem, which forms an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and remains in support of a final solution that guarantees the return of the city to Palestinian sovereignty as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Given that the Palestine question remains at the heart of unrest in the region and has constituted a long-standing challenge to this body, the OIC group reaffirms that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East requires firm and prompt action by the Security Council to enforce international law and to ensure compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with all of its legal obligations and commitments to ending its daily crimes and aggressions for the achievement of peace and justice.

Likewise, the OIC reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the Palestinian question until all of its aspects are justly and fully resolved. In this International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the OIC further appeals for the international community's sustained engagement and full support at this critical period in order to seize the current diplomatic opportunity to bring about the enforcement of United Nations resolutions and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land occupied since 1967.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their right to return, self-determination, sovereignty and independence in the State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): I have circulated my statement and will therefore not read it out in its entirety.

There can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Pouring more weapons into the conflict will only prolong the human suffering. For this reason, Norway welcomes the Secretary-General's convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, and we look forward to attending. We also reiterate the Secretary-General's call to the Syrian parties to ensure the full and effective participation of women. The logic of peace must replace the logic of war.

We urge both sides of the conflict to accept the invitation to the negotiating table and to embark on the challenging process of reaching agreement on an inclusive, Syrian-led transition and solution to the conflict. Going to the negotiating table is the first step. Remaining at the table is even more important.

It is vital that the conference yield concrete results. Violence must end. Ceasefires must be declared. Immediate, full and unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured and humanitarian principles respected. Syrian women and civil-society actors must be actively involved in the negotiations. That will increase the legitimacy of the process. The international community must come together in demanding an end to the conflict, as it did on the issue of the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. In our view, taking steps of this kind could facilitate an agreement on a transitional governing body, as outlined in the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

The humanitarian challenge is still enormous, and it will remain with us for years. We need to do even more. Assistance to Syria's neighbouring countries must be stepped up. Norway pledged $65 million in humanitarian assistance and $10 million for assisting

Syria's neighbouring countries at the second Kuwait pledging conference.

The destruction of Syria's chemical weapons is well under way under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. Norway is proud to be a part of that joint effort to eliminate those deadly weapons. We urge all parties involved to fulfil their international commitments to ensure that the chemical weapons are removed from Syria and destroyed within the agreed time frames.

The Middle East peace process is at a decisive phase. We commend President Obama and Secretary Kerry's leadership and dedication. Norway believes that given the broader situation in the region, this is the time for Palestinians and Israelis to agree on ending the conflict. A two-State solution whereby Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security is indeed within reach. The process shows how difficult the outstanding questions are: security, borders, the status of Jerusalem and refugees. Reaching agreement involves painful concessions and tough decisions, for both sides. Therefore, we urge the leaders on both sides to show courage and determination at this critical moment. This historic opportunity must not be squandered. Norway believes that such a historic compromise will be possible only if the core needs of both parties are duly addressed, and met, in a fair and balanced way.

Norway aligns itself with the position of the European Union (EU), as set out in the December 2009 EU Council conclusions, regarding the parameters for a solution to the outstanding questions. The solution must be in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements. We cannot allow the negotiations to be derailed. Norway condemns all use of violence. Norway calls for the parties to refrain from unilateral acts that could undermine the talks, change the situation on the ground or prejudge the outcome of the final-status negotiations. Settlement activities must stop.

Norway is deeply concerned about the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call for the lifting of the restrictions in compliance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) in all its elements, including the need for security for all civilian populations.

The institutional basis for an independent Palestine is already in place. However, the Palestinian Authority will continue to need generous financial support from donors in 2014 to support the efforts to achieve peace. Assistance to the Palestinian Authority amounted to $1.25 billion last year, a big improvement over the year before. That still leaves a budget deficit, which will add to Palestine's public debt. Norway urges donors to remain generous in their contributions to the Authority while the Palestinians strive to reach a negotiated settlement with Israel. We plan to hold a new meeting of the donors group, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, in late spring this year, in Brussels. There, we will review assistance for 2014.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): Before I begin, let me say that, as I think I am the fortieth speaker in this debate, I promise not to speak for more than half an hour. I shall, of course, read out the short version of my statement.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to you, Mr. President, as well as to the Foreign Minister of Jordan, for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Another year has begun, and peace, justice and stability remain elusive in the Middle East. The ongoing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands and the denial of the freedom and rights of the Palestinian people continue to demand the attention of the international community and require urgent action for redress, in conformity with international law and United Nations resolutions. This must be one of the priorities on the global agenda for the year 2014, a year that has been declared by the General Assembly to be the "International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People".

The Movement remains seriously concerned about the situation in Palestine as a result of the illegal policies that continue to be pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and their land. Over the past months, while the international community has been exerting efforts for tangible progress in the resumed negotiations and has articulated its full support for that process on the basis of the long-standing parameters rooted in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, Israel, the occupying Power, has instead, regrettably, continued to behave in a manner contradictory to those parameters, to the good faith required for the negotiations and to the overarching objectives of the peace process to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution.

Tensions continue to rise and to widen the gap between the expectations for the political process and the reality on the ground. A brief review of just the recent period shows that Israeli settlement activities, including the construction of settlements and the wall and the confiscation of more Palestinian land, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, military raids and arrests, and constant violence and provocations by extremist Israeli settlers, all have continued unabated, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Such violations are exacerbating the conditions on the ground and reinforcing doubts about Israel's true intentions and commitment to the just and lasting peace that the State of Palestine, with the strong support of the international community, including the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, has been exerting serious effort to achieve.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains extremely alarmed, in particular, by the escalation of acts of aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, especially in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque, resulting from provocations by Israeli extremists. The blatant disrespect for that holy site and those who come to worship there and the continued threats of further incursions are tantamount to grave acts of incitement that are stoking religious sensitivities and aggravating already high tensions. Israeli Government officials continue to recklessly fuel such religious tensions by encouraging extremists to acts of provocation that threaten to ignite a religious conflict that would have far-reaching and dangerous consequences for the region and beyond. Therefore, the Non-Aligned Movement once again draws the attention of the Security Council to all these serious matters that threaten international peace and security and calls for actions to halt all such Israeli incitement and for respect for the sanctity of religious sites.

NAM also reiterates its serious concern over the continued systematic Israeli violations of human rights of the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians in violent military raids, the excessive use of force against civilian protesters, the forced displacement of civilians and the arrest and detention of still more Palestinians. Despite the recent release of long-term Palestinian prisoners, Israel continues in an almost daily manner to arrest Palestinian civilians, including children. More than 5,000 Palestinians remain in Israeli jails. These are all serious concerns for the Movement.

The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip also continues to inflict grave socioeconomic losses and humanitarian hardship on the Palestinian people besieged there. NAM condemns those violations and urges the international community to persist with its calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately end the blockade and cease its collective punishment and all illegal actions against the Palestinian people under its occupation and respect its obligations under international law. If Israel persists in its contempt for international law, it will soon be high time for the international community to undertake measures to uphold the law and ensure accountability.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects. It is hoped that the current negotiations will succeed within the specified time frame in the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that will bring a complete end to the Israeli military occupation of Palestine and other occupied Arab lands and usher in an era of peace and stability in the Middle East.

At this critical juncture, the Non-Aligned Movement renews its calls for continued support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate historic struggle for justice, dignity, peace and the exercise of their rights to self-determination. The Non-Aligned Movement calls for a redoubling of international efforts, including by the Security Council and in line with our political, legal and moral obligations, towards the realization of those noble objectives this year.

Lebanon has suffered from repeated Israeli attacks against its territory with a heavy human and material toll, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel continues to violate Lebanese airspace and has intensified its incursions into Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular, resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security of Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

The Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, that have been intensified since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I thus conclude my statement given on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I now wish to make a brief statement in my national capacity.

In the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community should exert its utmost pressure on the occupying Power, the Israeli regime, to end its aggressive and expansionist policies and non-adherence to international law, norms and principles. This year, the Security Council should fulfil its long overdue responsibility and fully support all of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people by compelling the occupying regime to withdraw from all Palestinian and other Arab territories. Without a doubt, continued inaction by the Council will only lead to more atrocities by that criminal regime which, in the past 65 years, has waged over 10 wars against all of its neighbours, continues to threaten countries of the region and uninterruptedly commits savage attacks against peoples under occupation, in particular defenceless women and innocent children, as documented by competent international organizations and as is strongly condemned by the international community, including even supporters of the regime.

The Israeli regime, which is the only regime in the region to possess every type of weapon of mass destruction but is not a party to any of the treaties banning them, should also be compelled to join such treaties, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, without any further delay or precondition, and place all its nuclear activities under the comprehensive safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in order to remove the sole obstacle to the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East proposed by Iran in 1974.

Over the past several months, the Middle East has witnessed the escalation of foreign-backed terrorist acts in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, targeting hospitals, schools, religious sites and diplomatic property and claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, including a diplomat from the Iranian embassy in Beirut following a terrorist attack committed by a terrorist group led by a Saudi citizen. Undoubtedly, those are only but a few of the examples of the catastrophic impact of violent and extremist narratives. Those developments gave support to the very timely action taken by the General Assembly when it rejected violent extremism and promoted moderation and tolerance through its adoption by consensus of resolution 67/127, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism", in the final days of 2013 — a proposal that was based on an idea presented to the General Assembly by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Finally, we firmly believe that the recent strong support of the international community for the efforts of the Iraqi Government against terrorist groups should also be extended to Syria by placing the question of combating terrorism on the agenda of second Geneva Conference on Syria. Likewise, every effort should be made to end the ongoing conflict and to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in order to allow Syrian people to freely determine their destiny.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this open debate. Jordan's intimate knowledge of the conflict will no doubt be an asset to the Council's efforts to find a resolution to this long-standing conflict.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Council meets today at a moment of heightened diplomacy in the Middle East, from the second Geneva Conference on Syria, on Wednesday, 22 January, to ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Five months ago, following the concerted efforts of the United States, we saw a positive development in the political process with the resumption of negotiations with a view to achieving a lasting and comprehensive agreement between Israel and Palestine by April this year. Whereas the resumption of negotiations remains a promising sign, as it has brought an end to the paralysis that plagued the peace process for some years, the parties will have to make tough decisions in the weeks ahead.

South Africa identifies with the struggle of the Palestinians for self-determination and continues to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for the establishment of an independent State. We welcome the launch on 16 January of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and South Africa joins other voices urging that the observance be used to redouble efforts to achieve a lasting and durable peace between Israel and Palestine. We remain steadfast in our belief that the only way a solution to that protracted conflict can be found is through a peaceful and fair negotiation process carried out in an environment conducive to fruitful deliberations — that is, an environment free of intimidation, fear, violence and other obstructionist activities.

The construction of settlements by Israel remains the biggest obstacle to progress in the peace talks. Nonetheless, Israel's illegal settlement activities continue with impunity. Again we warn that the continued settlement construction changes the geographical makeup of Palestine and could make impossible the creation of two States, in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully alongside Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The parties need to continue their positive confidence-building measures, and in that regard the release by Israel of Palestinian prisoners in December was a positive development. However, it is undermined by the continued arrest and detention of Palestinian citizens by Israeli authorities. Further, the release date was followed by a new barrage of illegal settlement activities with the announcement by Israel of the expansion of 1,400 new settlements in the West Bank. Those actions by Israel collectively serve to stifle the very few positive actions in the process and puts the sincerity of Israel's commitment to the peace process in question. We therefore call on Israel to refrain from actions that undermine progress in the peace talks.

We condemn all violence, which further undermines the possibility of a peaceful settlement. Mahatma Ghandi said that the worst form of violence is poverty, and therefore the continued economic and political isolation of the Gaza Strip further exacerbates the fragile political process. South Africa once again emphasizes the need for Israel to lift the illegal blockade against the people of Gaza.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is currently at a critical point, with the renewed efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to agree on a framework for permanent status negotiations. The test will be whether current efforts will achieve a two-State solution and also realize the vision of an independent Palestinian State.

Allow me at this stage to turn to the situation in Syria. The continuation of the crisis in Syria is of great concern. Although progress is being made in the destruction of Syria's chemical stocks, the conflict continues. Without an inclusive political settlement, the consequences for regional peace and security will be greater. South Africa fully supports the efforts of the United Nations in bringing about a political solution to that protracted conflict, and looks forward to participating in the second Geneva Conference on Syria later this week.

South Africa has steadfastly maintained that it is an unassailable right of the Syrian people to have peace and democracy. South Africa remains convinced that in a complex, divided society, such as Syria's, there can be no military solution to the conflict, and we have condemned the continuing supply of weapons to that area, as it has entrenched the false notion that the use of arms can end the conflict. We are convinced that if the crisis continues to be fuelled with weapons, we will witness in Syria, as we have elsewhere in the world, that it is ultimately the people of Syria who will pay the price, while those supplying weapons live in safety far away from the crisis.

Furthermore, we are very conscious of the importance of a greater role for women in ending conflicts and building peace, and urge a proportional participation of women in the talks in Geneva slated to begin on 22 January. South Africa continues to maintain that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is a Syrian-owned process where all Syrian parties must take responsibility to end the violence and commit to finding lasting peace.

In conclusion, the delicate process of negotiations between Israel and Palestine requires trust, and trust is earned by action and not by mere words. We continue to believe that peace in the Middle East is dependent on the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. Vacating occupied lands is also an imperative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate your country, Mr. President, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for the way in which it is leading the work of the Council this month. Allow me to also personally thank you for your presence and for the statement you made on behalf of the Council at the first meeting of 2014 of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held last Thursday.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Our Committee is grateful for the continued diplomatic efforts of the international community, and first and foremost for the steadfast efforts of United States Secretary of State Kerry to encourage the parties to reach a comprehensive agreement.

The Committee calls on all parties to act responsibly so as to create a climate conducive to productive negotiations that will allow for a solution of all final status issues and bring an end to the Israeli occupation, a total Israeli military withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

As we approach the April deadline, prospects for peace continue to be undermined by the occupying Power's actions on the ground, in particular the expansion of settlements. Israel has announced the construction of thousands of new settlement units since the start of negotiations in July, the latest of which, concerning more than 1,400 units, was announced 10 days ago. The 144 settlements, scattered throughout the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and connected with each other by roads built for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers, are totally inconsistent with the two-State solution. Their continued expansion undermines the Palestinians' trust in Israel's commitment to achieving that solution. Peace will be possible only when the occupation is brought to an end and the State of Palestine is truly independent, sovereign and viable.

Moreover, settlement activities constitute grave breaches of international law. The Committee calls on the Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to uphold international law and its own resolutions, including resolution 446 (1979), which determined that settlements have no legal validity and called on Israel to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Committee is also troubled by the recent tensions on the border between Gaza and Israel, the rockets fired from Gaza into Israel and the Israeli air strikes on Gaza, all of which could undermine the fragile ceasefire between the two sides and have devastating consequences for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

The General Assembly has proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and requested the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to organize activities in cooperation with Governments, United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. The objective of the International Year, which was officially launched last Thursday, is to promote the key theme of solidarity with the Palestinian people as a contribution to international awareness of the question of Palestine and of the obstacles to the ongoing peace process, including the illegal settlements. A wide range of activities is being organized, and we count on the entire membership, including Council members, for their cooperation and engagement to make 2014 a historic year for the long-overdue two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): My delegation congratulates you, Sir, on this month's Jordanian presidency of the Security Council, and commends your convening of this timely open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Jordan's leadership draws on insights into the region that are of great benefit to the Council, and it will be from Amman, in your own country, that His Holiness Pope Francis, as a witness to peace, will begin his own pilgrimage of prayer to the Holy Land on 24 May.

For the Holy See, the resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians constitutes a positive development, in regard to which Pope Francis has expressed the hope that both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions. Courageous decisions are seldom easy, and can place demands on us that may be politically difficult and unpopular.

Yet when faced with the reality of conflict in the Middle East all right-minded people see the need for change. Peace is not simply the absence of war, but requires that the demands of justice be met for all peoples and communities. My delegation accordingly joins its voice once more with those of all people of good will who welcome, with great hope, the re-engagement of direct, serious and concrete negotiations so that a rejuvenated peace process may help unfold better prospects for the future.

Of great significance, furthermore, is the recent agreement with Iran with respect to its nuclear programme, which offers great hope that an era of distrust may be replaced by a new climate of trust and cooperation. It is hoped that it will be fully implemented and open the path to a definitive agreement.

The Holy See has urgently and repeatedly voiced its clear concerns for the peace and welfare of all the peoples of the Middle East. Most recently, the ongoing situation in Syria prompted Pope Francis to reiterate the Holy See's profound solicitude for the situation in the whole region. Calling the Catholic faithful to prayer and fasting for Syria in September 2013, Pope Francis made a heartfelt plea

> "that the violence and devastation in Syria may cease immediately and that a renewed effort be undertaken to achieve a just solution to the fratricidal conflict. Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake... War begets war, violence begets violence".

May the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria be an occasion for a renewed reflection on the criteria needed to offer a new start for that beautiful nation, left prey to indescribable destruction and loss of lives. Due to political preconditions, those criteria must include an immediate ceasefire without procrastination, including a renewed commitment to promoting initiatives of peace instead of the sending and funding of arms, which have escalated the violence and conflict.

At the same time, it must involve an immediate rollout of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction for the countless refugees and displaced persons being housed temporarily in neighbouring countries, where so many suffer life-threatening shortages, inter alia, of nutrition, safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The urgency of rebuilding peace trumps the resolution of other political and social questions, although such rebuilding will certainly need to include new forms of political participation and representation that ensures the voice and security of all groups calling Syria their home.

Pope Francis has expressed his deep concern for those experiencing relocation and displacement in efforts to escape incessant violence, as well as for those nations challenged by the influx of a great number of refugees. The international community cannot stand aloof to their praiseworthy efforts to assist. The Holy See pledges to continue — through its wide array of educational, health care and social service outreach efforts — to work alongside those alleviating the suffering of all of those who have been marginalized, uprooted or oppressed by conflict.

Many of the refugees constitute a worrying exodus of Christians from their bimillenial homelands owing, among other causes, to the targeting and instability visited upon them by fundamentalist and extremist forces. Interreligious dialogue and reconciliation will therefore be required to restore the balance in the rich and complex pluralism of Syrian society. The Holy See stands ready to support all religious communities in their efforts to reach new understandings and the restoration of trust after these years of violence, revenge and recrimination.

The Syrian people have demonstrated by their history an ability to live together in peace. Regional and international rivalries that have little to do with the Syrian communities themselves must therefore be set aside so that at the heart of the discussions are not these interests but rather those of the individual human person and the good of Syria. To this end, all the interested parties are called to work together if conditions for lasting peace are to be put in place. The second Geneva talks must accordingly ensure the inclusive participation of all parties to this conflict in the region and beyond. The Holy See wholeheartedly wishes to support this objective.

Finally, I wish to call to mind the concern expressed by Pope Francis for the ongoing political problems in

Lebanon, and also for Iraq, which struggles to attain the peace and stability for which it hopes.

For the United Nations the challenges of the Middle East are a clarion call for its peacemaking role, the very raison d'être for this institution. May this open debate help muster the much-needed political will to spur the international community to make a real difference in the lives of the peoples of the Middle East and help them to fulfil their dream of long-awaited peace.

The global economic situation no longer permits the international community to continue indefinitely to fund growing refugee populations. Political solutions are the best solutions even for the economies of these countries, because peace is the necessary precondition for the socioeconomic stability capable of attracting development funds. In his address on 13 January to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis therefore urged the whole world, with great insistence, to address the problems of the Middle East and to act before any further deterioration of the situation occurs.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you Sir, on your patience and your efforts this day. I will be very brief, and will distribute the full text of my statement in Arabic and English to all representatives. The Government of Iraq also thanks the members of the Security Council for their adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/1, supporting Iraq in its fight against terrorism.

I congratulate the Palestinian people on the launch of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Another year has passed and the peace process in the Middle East still stumbles. The international community seeks to reach a peaceful settlement. Meanwhile, Israel continues to pursue its arbitrary and illegal practices, depriving the Palestinians of their rights and freedoms. Israel continues to persist in its settlement policies, constructing and building new settlements and a separation wall, and continuing to seize more Palestinian land every day. Israel has also imposed a blockade on Gaza and arrested numerous Palestinians, and continues its practice of collective punishment, in addition to the provocations posed by extremist Jewish settlers, which can only escalate tensions in the Middle East.

Iraq supports the international community's efforts to make a success of the process of peace in the Middle East, based on unwavering principles, including those enunciated in United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We commend the efforts of the Palestinians and the Government of President Mahmoud Abbas. We also pay tribute to the continued good offices and good will of the United States to encourage both sides to reach a two-State solution to resolve the conflict. In this regard, we hold Israel responsible for not implementing binding resolutions of the Security Council and urge the international community and the Security Council to bring pressure to bear on Israel to honour its commitments and to implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Finally, we must work diligently to restore stability to the troubled Middle East, with all its conflicts that threaten international peace and security. Finding a just solution that will enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in a State based on the 1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem, is a noble goal to which we aspire and that would achieve security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Allow me first to congratulate Your Royal Highness on Jordan's assumption of both its membership of the Council and the presidency of the Council for this month.

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the Council for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing earlier today.

The situation in the Middle East region remains fragile and unpredictable, with unprecedented changes in several countries in the region and the ongoing conflict in Syria. We look forward to the success of the efforts of the international community this week to resolve the situation in Syria.

We firmly support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with

Israel. We also continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. We look forward to a meaningful 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was launched on 16 January by the Secretary-General.

We welcome the continuation of the negotiation rounds between Israel and Palestine that began in late July last year with the aim of reaching a deal within nine months. It is unfortunate that so far there has been little visible progress, but we hope that both sides will seize the opportunity presented by direct negotiations and strike a peace deal in the critical months ahead.

The recent announcement by Israel of new settlement construction is regrettable. The settlement activities are not only illegal but also pose a threat to the two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to stop these settlement activities.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, meanwhile, remains a cause for serious concern. The blockade on Gaza is not only adversely affecting the population but also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence, thereby further complicating the situation on the ground and increasing Israel's vulnerability and security concerns.

India has always supported the nation-building efforts of Palestine through technical and economic assistance, including budgetary support. In 2012, India pledged $10 million as budgetary support to Palestine and signed three memorandums of understanding for development projects in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and the construction of schools. In September 2013, India contributed $1 million as a part of its annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), primarily for the provision of food and medicines to the displaced people in refugee camps under the various UNRWA programmes.

We are also implementing a series of development projects in Palestine, funded by the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum. We have thus far been able to assist in the rehabilitation of a cultural and hospital centre in Gaza, the construction and equipping of a centre for person with physical disabilities in Nablus, and support for recreational activities through infrastructure support for a football stadium in Ramallah.

India welcomes the efforts made by the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations towards the removal and elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and hopes that the Joint Mission will be able to meet the final deadline of 30 June for the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme. In December 2013, India offered a financial contribution of $1 million to the trust fund set up at the OPCW at The Hague for use in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and related facilities. India has also offered the services of its experts to be used by the OPCW in destruction verification activities and training slots for personnel participating in the United Nations-OPCW Joint Mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

In conclusion, let me express our full support for the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We hope that it will launch a Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue that will resolve the current crisis and meet the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): On behalf of my country, I warmly welcome the presence here earlier today of Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign and Expatriates Affairs of Jordan, and congratulate him on his country's election to the Security Council and on assuming its presidency for this month. I also take this opportunity to welcome the newly elected members and express appreciation for those that have completed their work on the Security Council. I offer my gratitude to Jordan's presidency for the timely convening of this open debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In my national capacity, I would like to inform the Council that, while chairing the OIC in 2011 and 2012, Kazakhstan, supported by all OIC member States, did its best to contribute to the peace process in the Middle East and to overcome disputes between the various parties to the conflict. One of the strategic goals of Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was to support Palestine's aspiration to take its rightful place as a full Member of the United Nations. Under Kazakh leadership, the OIC dispatched its first-ever delegation to the Holy

See to raise the issue of Palestinian sovereignty over the property of the Catholic Church in the occupied territories. We have also actively promoted the Palestinian cause in a number of international forums, and now my country, in its national capacity, is eager to continue to contribute to the international action in that direction.

From the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, my country has expressed support for all possible opportunities to arrive at a mutually acceptable formula for achieving peace between the parties. We see that the conflict continues to rage, despite relentless international efforts to halt it and to reach an acceptable solution based on international law, as demonstrated by the sincere determination of all parties concerned. The entire world, including my country, looks forward to achieving a balanced and widely agreed solution at the peace talks.

Kazakhstan welcomes the start of the process to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, and hopes that there will be no delay beyond the end of June deadline for the total removal of all such materials. We believe that the Syrian Government will extend its full and constructive cooperation in this respect to the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. We are confident that those joint steps of the Syrian Government and the multilateral community will serve as yet another political and practical measure to mitigate tensions in the region.

The persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to threaten regional and international peace and security, and its negative implications are not confined to that region only, but are felt well beyond and around the globe. Kazakhstan supports a peaceful settlement of the problem based on international law, including compliance with the pertinent Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We support the efforts of the Quartet to restore the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process to identify borders based on the principle of the peaceful coexistence of both States.

Kazakhstan will continue to render its support to the stabilization process in the Middle East as an integral part of establishing peace and security in the region. We recognize the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, peacefully coexisting with Israel. We also advocate its efforts to obtain full-fledged membership of the United Nations.

My country condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and in this regard supports the aspirations of all the peoples of the region to live in security. Kazakhstan hopes that the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, the international and regional organizations, and the good will of the participants engaged in the negotiation process will lead to the achievement of a lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): Recent developments in the Middle East have shifted the focus of the international community from the Palestinian issue to more pressing items on the agenda: the situation in Syria and preserving regional stability. However, Ukraine believes that, in the current circumstances, the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue should remain one of the buttresses of a stable and secure Middle East. We understand the claims on both sides and think that it is only through compromise and direct Israeli-Palestinian talks that the sides will reach a final agreement.

Ukraine welcomes the efforts of the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, in advancing direct dialogue between the parties with the aim of achieving a framework agreement that would provide guidelines for permanent status negotiations and address all the core issues — in other words, a full and final peace treaty between the parties. We see some positive signs. The third group of prisoners was released in late 2013. We are very well aware that it was a very painful and difficult decision for the Israeli side. We understand the Israeli security concerns and support all initiatives aimed at elaborating adequate guarantees.

My State also understands the need to continue to assist the Palestinian Authority in building its social and economic development, which is of critical importance for the viability of a future Palestinian State and to its Palestinian inhabitants to be able to lead a normal life. We hope that 2014, proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, will contribute to finding a true and durable solution to the conflict.

Ukraine supports a two-State solution resulting from successful negotiations between Palestine and Israel. We support the Palestinian people's efforts to obtain an independent State, and we hope to see Palestinians enjoying freedom and prosperity in their own State. A historic compromise should be achieved.

That brings us to the importance of the mediation endeavours of the regional players, with Jordan being one of the key brokers. With this in mind, we support the official Jordanian position, voiced earlier this year by Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. Jordan should be part of the final agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Its position should be taken into account while settling the important issues of the status of Jerusalem, border issues, water and security arrangements.

Ukraine has repeatedly expressed its concern over the situation in Syria, where a two-year conflict continues to take the lives of innocent civilians. In that context, the important task in the short term is to ensure the holding of a successful second Geneva conference on Syria. We have high expectations for the results of that conference, while welcoming the strong diplomatic efforts of Russia and the United States. We appeal to all parties involved to overcome the contradictions that have long hindered the development of consensus on the issue of a Syrian settlement within the Security Council.

The humanitarian situation in the country is also dangerous. We call on all parties, in particular the opposition groups, to provide unhindered access to humanitarian organizations in the country in order to begin to overcome the terrible situation that is currently affecting the lives of civilians, particularly women and children. In that context, we welcome the recent international donor conference, held in Kuwait, which resulted in the international community managing to raise $2.4 billion of the required $6.5 billion.

However, benefiting from international assistance is impossible without an understanding between the parties to the conflict. We are concerned about the lack of unity inside the opposition camp in Syria and urge it to take part in the second Geneva conference in order to reach a political compromise, which is needed now more than ever. Ukraine believes that the only possible solution to the Syrian crisis is an inclusive political dialogue and the necessary transformation in the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Syria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): I am compelled to take the floor again today. I will be brief.

As in previous meetings, we have heard many Arab and other representatives from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) criticizing Israel. I would like again to point out to those same representatives, Arab and others, that they choose to ignore the crimes of the Chair of NAM, Iran, at their own peril. In particular, it comes as quite a surprise that the Non-Aligned Movement has the nerve to lecture Israel on human rights, while two members of NAM, Iran and Syria, are the world's worst human rights abusers. Iran oppresses its own people and helps other States to slaughter theirs. Today in Iran, free expression is repressed, minorities are persecuted, women are denied their basic rights and the regime has executed more people than any other country in the world. Since fighting broke out in Syria almost three years ago, Iran has provided financial, political and logistical support to Al-Assad, while also sending Hizbullah militia to assist the Syrian Government forces in killing civilians. NAM's cynicism and hypocrisy is shameful.

I must admit that I was astonished to hear the Iranian representative speak about non-compliance with Security Council resolutions. How absurd that is. I wish that I could be shocked by the accusations hurled by the Syrian representative today, turning the meeting into a theatre of the absurd. The Syrian representative has the audacity to shed crocodile tears about the situation of the Palestinians, while his own Government kills and pursues a policy of starvation against the Palestinian population in the Yarmouk camp. While the Syrian Government bombs schools and kills children, the Syrian representative finds it necessary to complain here in the Security Council about the curriculum in schools in Israel. That is the theatre of the absurd at its worst.

The Syrian representative's accusations against Israel with regard to violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement are baseless. Syria systematically violates the Agreement and Israel only provides and will continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Golan population, including soldiers and other residents of the Golan who are severely injured. Just recently, Israel treated a severaly injured soldier of the Syrian armed forces, who came to the border asking for help. That happened only two weeks ago but, of course, that was not part of the Syrian representative's statement here at today's meeting.

I would like to respond to a State in our southern vincinity, whose representative spoke about the situation in Gaza. To begin with, there is no blockade on Gaza. In fact, all goods and humanitarian aid — let me repeat it — all humanitarian aid entering Gaza comes from Israel. It seems that that representative's concerns has less to do with the humanitarian need in Gaza and more to do with demonizing Israel. One does not need to be able to understand the writing on the Rosetta Stone to discover that Gaza has an additional entry point.

Lastly, it took a great deal of audacity on the part of the Malaysian representative to criticize the human rights record of my country. Israel is a thriving multicultural democracy, in which the rights of all minorities are respected and all religions are tolerated. That is in contrast to Malaysia, whose serious human rights violations include torture, the denial of due process and the abuse of workers' rights. That is to say nothing of the Government curtailing the right to freedom of expression and religion.

I could continue but, out of respect for the serious work before us and the limited time of the Council, I will refrain from doing so.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Syria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Adi (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with our statements on the subject matter before us today and with regard to putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, I will respond to some comments made by the Israeli representative.

The funding of and support for armed groups in Syria by certain States are clear. As is well kown, the conflict and wars in the Middle East are caused by the Israeli occupation. That is well documented by many international organizations. Israel's history is bleak and full of slaughter. Israel has occupied the Arab territories for more than 60 years. Israeli State terrorism has perpetrated the worst crimes against civilians in the Syrian Golan, Lebanon and Palestine.

For Israel to claim to regret the situation in Syria is an attempt to divert attention from the Israeli occupation of the Golan since 1967, wreaking humiliation and slaughter, expelling our citizens and flouting all international resolutions that have urged Israel to put an end to the occupation of the Arab territories. The assistance referred to by the representative of Israel, which he placed in a humanitarian context, must not mislead the Council. Israel persists in allowing terrorists to work in the area of separation and to perpetrate their terrorist acts.

We could speak at length of Israel's actions. What we have heard today bears witness to its practices. In the interest of brevity, that is all I will say.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7097

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 January 2014

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 7097th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 21 January 2014, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

> "On 21 January 2014, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 7097th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.
>
> "The President invited Ms. Lisa Buttenheim, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.
>
> "The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Ms. Buttenheim."

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United Nations

S/PV.7098

Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7098th meeting

Wednesday, 22 January 2014, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estreme
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506.

14-21250 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide; Ms. Zainab Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui: I wish to thank you, Sir, for inviting me to brief the Security Council on our visit to the Central African Republic from 17 to 21 December 2013, and in particular on the situation of children and armed conflict. At the outset, allow me to also express my appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg, Ambassador Sylvie Lucas, and General Babacar Gaye, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), for their leadership and support for the children and armed conflict mandate.

In the light of growing protection concerns resulting from mounting attacks against civilians and the deep human rights crisis ravaging the country, I travelled with my colleagues, Special Adviser Adama Dieng and Ms. Nancee Oku Bright, a senior representative of the Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bangura, to assess the impact of the conflict on women and children as well as the risk of genocide. The goal of our mission, in line with the "Rights up front" framework, was to advocate for action and responses from the transitional authorities and obtain their commitment to stopping the violence. Our visit took place soon after the 5 December attacks on the capital, Bangui, and against the backdrop of increasing sectarian violence, which is continuing today.

Despite its chronic instability, the Central African Republic had not previously suffered from such a violent outbreak of religiously motivated violence. Yet, today, the country is trapped in a spiral of vengeance that has destroyed the social fabric and undermined trust among communities for generations to come. I have witnessed members of those communities pitted against one another, fleeing and seeking refuge in churches and mosques. They are living in fear of being attacked. They are even afraid of burying their dead. Entire villages have been burned and are burning down as we speak in this Chamber today.

The impact of the conflict on children has been dramatic, with unprecedented levels of brutality. Children have been directly attacked, maimed, killed and beheaded in Bangui, Bouar, Bossangoa and Bozoum. For over a year, ex-Séléka combatants and, more recently, anti-Balaka militias, have actively recruited children and forced them to commit atrocities. Recent estimates indicate that as many as 6,000 children could be currently associated with armed forces and groups. During my visit, I witnessed youths who had taken up arms, having been manipulated by both sides and divided along religious lines. They have become both victims and perpetrators of the ongoing sectarian violence.

The lack of security has resulted in the displacement over the course of 2013 of nearly half a million children across the country. Those children are in urgent need of protection and assistance and are at a greater risk of suffering violations. Schools and hospitals have been attacked and looted. Medical personnel have been repeatedly threatened and brutally targeted everywhere in the country, leaving an already fragile social infrastructure and basic services in complete disarray.

Our visit coincided with the transfer of authority from the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic to the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) and with the initial phase of the deployment of Operation Sangaris. While the presence of African Union and French forces is deterring ongoing violence, too many civilians remain without basic protection, as crimes are being committed daily in Bangui and in the provinces. I am hopeful that the commendable efforts of the African Union, the deployment of additional troops by the European Union, together with the evolution of the political landscape, will contribute to re-establishing law and order. The rapid strengthening of BINUCA and the deployment of MISCA's civilian component will be key to ensuring adequate human rights monitoring and protection expertise.

We must urgently ensure better coordination among all actors on the ground, including through civil-military liaisons. We should optimize existing resources in Bangui and scale up capacity in the provinces where military deployment and the presence of humanitarian actors remains too limited.

On a positive note, on 6 January the process of identifying and separating children started at five ex-Séléka cantonment sites. On 17 January, 23 children were released in Bangui and taken to a UNICEF-supported transit and orientation centre. That is the result of the dialogue between United Nations representatives and the transitional authorities to allow child protection actors unimpeded access to military and cantonment sites. The former head of the transition reiterated that commitment to me during our visit, and it is my hope that that engagement will continue in the new phase of the transitional process. I am encouraged by the recent election of Ms. Catherine Samba-Panza as Head of the Transition in the Central African Republic, and I join her in urging all parties to immediately stop the violence.

The process of separating and reintegrating children associated with armed forces and groups in the Central African Republic will not be an easy task. First, it cannot happen in a vacuum but must be part of a comprehensive and holistic disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. Secondly, the current United Nations civilian capacity remains all too limited and must be strengthened urgently to confront the ongoing situation, as well as the challenges of the DDR process.

Child protection actors need adequate human and financial resources to provide the needed reintegration assistance. At the same time, the sustained support and cooperation of the military forces on the ground are key to ensuring children's security and continued protection. As recent experience in the Central African Republic shows, children formerly associated with armed forces and groups are especially vulnerable to rerecruitment and retaliatory violence.

We need to send a stronger signal to the perpetrators of these atrocious crimes that they will be held to account. The international community should spare no effort and use all the tools at its disposal. It is crucial to assist the transitional authorities to restore law enforcement and establish a judicial response to the ongoing violations. This is essential to deterring further violence and starting to re-establish trust among communities.

I strongly welcome the imminent establishment of a commission of inquiry, as well as the Council's intention to adopt targeted measures against perpetrators of violations against children. I also welcome the appointment by the Human Rights Council of the Independent Expert Marie-Thérèse Keita Bocoum, and I look forward to working closely with all mandate-holders to ensure complementarities in our work.

This crisis has been looming for over a year, and we have run out of time to prevent the violence from escalating. Our only option today is to scale up our response with robust, immediate and urgent actions. I am here today to plead for the Council's continued attention to the crisis in which the Central African Republic has plunged. It is my hope that the Council will unite to step up and sustain its engagement, with the support of the African Union and States of the region. Today's political commitment and mobilization of the international community to end the crisis in the Central African Republic must be swiftly translated into adequate responses to protect civilians, provide emergency assistance to the most vulnerable, and accompany the transition towards the stabilization of the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dieng.

Mr. Dieng: I should like first of all to thank the Missions of Jordan and Luxembourg — and particularly you, Mr. President, and Ambassador Sylvie Lucas — for convening this briefing.

As Council members are aware, during our visit to the Central African Republic, our main objective was to assess the risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity occurring in the country and to advocate with transitional authorities and other relevant stakeholders for a cessation of violence and enhanced protection of the civilian population.

It was evident from what we saw and heard that the situation in the Central African Republic was desperate. We received reports and testimony from victims and witnesses that told of shocking episodes of violence perpetrated against innocent Central Africans, including women and children. And this violence continues even as we are discussing the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic today.

As I said in my previous statement at the Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council on 1 November 2013, we face a situation of widespread and massive violations of human rights and abuses such as have never been witnessed before in the country. There have been widespread reports of summary executions and other forms of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, forced displacements, and acts of mutilation and sexual violence committed against adults and children, as well as the destruction and widespread looting of property, including hospitals, schools, churches and mosques. At the same time, as Council members will hear in greater detail from my colleague Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha Kang, the humanitarian situation is equally very disturbing.

In response to continued attacks by ex-Séléka elements targeting Christian civilians since December 2012, traditional, community-based self-defence groups across the country evolved into a more organized Christian militias known as the anti-Balaka, which have targeted ex-Séléka members and Muslim civilians suspected of supporting them. Reports received indicate that the anti-Balaka militias are becoming more organized than before and reportedly include some former army soldiers sympathetic to former President Bozizé. These former soldiers have reportedly played a leadership role in organizing attacks against Muslim civilians. For example, attacks in Bangui on 5 and 6 December resulted in the deaths of at least 1,000 people, most of whom were ex-Séléka members and Muslim civilians. In interviews with some individuals who claimed to be members of anti-Balaka militias in Bangui, they alleged that the militias have deployed in all 16 provinces of the country to mobilize Christian civilians against Muslim civilians.

On the other hand, the ex-Séléka elements continue to carry out attacks against Christian civilians throughout the country. While in the Central African Republic, we received testimony from people who had witnessed the killing of Christian civilians by ex-Séléka during a series of reprisal attacks.

The religious leaders in Bossangoa had divergent views on who bore responsibility for the ongoing violence in the province. The Bishop of Bossangoa diocese decried the abuses committed against Christians and the perceived complicity of the Muslim communities. On the other hand, the representative of the Muslim community in Bossangoa decried continued attacks against Muslims by anti-Balaka, who in his view were being hosted and supported by the local Catholic bishop.

In consultations with the then Head of Transition, Michel Djotodia, I stated to him clearly that he bears primary responsibility for security and that he should take all measures possible to protect all populations, irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliation. We urged Mr. Djotodia to join forces with religious leaders and civil society to immediately embark on a reconciliation campaign aimed at putting an end to the violence and to the hatred between communities.

The violence that was initially perceived as a confrontation between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militias quickly evolved into a very dangerous confrontation between Muslim and Christian civilians, and the level of hatred between these communities shocked me. Incitement to commit violence on the basis of religion or ethnicity and deliberate and targeted attacks against civilians based on their identity are factors that indicate a high risk both of crimes against humanity and of genocide.

There is no doubt that the actions of the African-led International Support Mission for the Central African Republic (MISCA) and of French troops have contributed immensely to the protection of Central Africans, in particular in and around camps for internally displaced persons. However, it is evident that their resources and capacity to protect are limited, given the scale of the violence and the fact that it is happening across the country and MISCA is still only partially deployed. There is an urgent need for the full deployment of MISCA peacekeepers as soon as possible.

Another concern emerging from our mission and which has had a negative impact on civilian protection was the perception by some that peacekeepers deployed in the country were not neutral. Some interlocutors alleged that peacekeepers, in some instances, were perceived to side either with anti-Balaka or ex-Séléka elements, which has eroded trust in some instances and affected their capacity to act.

In our interaction with religious leaders, we noted that, despite concerted efforts by the Archbishop and the Imam of Bangui to promote peace and dialogue, the impact of the initiatives undertaken since December 2012 remains limited. There is an urgent need to support and intensify such interreligious dialogue, both at the national and at the community levels.

In my assessment, the widespread, unchecked nature of attacks by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militias, as well as by armed civilians associated with them, against civilians on the basis of religion or ethnicity constitute crimes against humanity. If not halted, there is a risk of genocide in the country.

The primary responsibility for the protection of the population lies with the Central African authorities. However, recognizing the fact that the transitional authorities have neither the capacity to protect the civilian population nor to exercise control over the armed elements that are attacking them, particularly women and children, the international community must take concrete measures to assist the State to stop the abuses and protect civilians. There is an urgent need to support the full and effective deployment of MISCA. African countries should urgently contribute troops to the Mission.

There should be concerted efforts to promote and support a national peace and reconciliation process. There is an urgent need to promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims to mitigate the existing ethnic and religious divisions in the country. As a first step among a series of initiatives, my Office is working to support the efforts of the President of the Commission on Human Rights of the National Transitional Council and the National Coordinator of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to organize peace forums in the country that will bring together community and religious leaders from seven provinces. But that is not enough. I urge the international community to contribute to the process.

It will be difficult to promote reconciliation and restore peace in the country without addressing the current culture of impunity. The human rights violations and abuses that have occurred have sowed seeds of hatred in communities. It is very important that we support all initiatives, including the Commission of Inquiry, to identify perpetrators and hold those responsible for violations and abuses accountable. We should also consider the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. There can be no excuse or justification for condoning impunity.

Although the international community is responding late in the day, there is still a window to act to mobilize appropriate resources and to reverse one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crises of our time. We need to uphold our responsibility to protect Central Africans from the risk of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Dieng for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bangura.

Ms. Bangura: I want to thank the Security Council, under the presidency of the Kingdom of Jordan, for inviting us to contribute to the efforts to end violence in the Central African Republic. I am also grateful to the Permanent Representation of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg for supporting this initiative.

Exactly one year ago, I briefed the Council following my visit to the Central African Republic from 5 to 13 December 2012 (see S/PV.6899). I noted the horrendous trends of sexual violence and warned that, if parties were not made to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, the consequences would be grave. I referred to two joint communiqués, the first signed between the United Nations and the Government and the other with armed groups participating in the national steering committee on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, aimed at consolidating the commitment of the parties to the conflict to prevent crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. I also recalled that the Central African Republic was a forgotten conflict, and I warned the international community to pay particular attention to the management of regional aspects of the crisis.

Today, the situation in Central African Republic has deteriorated and many of the worst predictions have, unfortunately, come true. Communities have taken up weapons, killing each other based on religious affinity. Part of the tragedy is that this extreme animosity is new; previously, those communities lived with each other, worked side by side and intermarried. Clearly this could have been prevented.

The participation of children in the commission of those atrocious crimes may signify the point of no return, beyond which the cohabitation of certain communities may be impossible in the near future. There should be no doubt that the violence in the Central African Republic will stain the conscience of its people and the world forever.

At the invitation of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Babacar Gaye, I dispatched Nancee Oku Bright, my Chief of Staff, to participate in a joint mission to the Central African Republic, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, from 17 to 21 December 2013. The mission was assisted by a joint technical-level mission organized in conjunction with the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, from 12 to 23 December, which travelled to Bouar and coordinated with a fact-finding team deployed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, during the same period.

The delegation observed the unfolding situation of violence in the Central African Republic and, in some cases, eye-witnessed near-lynching incidents and empty villages with homes still burning. We learned about the growing strength and organization of armed groups, in particular anti-Balaka, who have colluded with former elements of the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA) and are targeting Muslim combatants and civilians. Likewise, Muslim civilians have created militias to protect themselves and have engaged in retaliatory attacks, reportedly with the aid of Séléka and Chadian elements.

Sexual violence continues to be pervasive in the conflict. Between January and November 2013, the United Nations recorded at least 4,530 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by armed men, largely believed to be Séléka, in Bangui, Boali, Bossembélé, Damara, Mbaiki, Sibut and Prefecture de l'Ouham Pende. Following the 5 December attacks by anti-Balaka and FACA elements on military positions in Bangui, there are reports that conflict-related sexual violence has continued to be used. The team received reports of sexual violence used by anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka militias during house-to-house searches and retaliatory attacks. The mission also confirmed that forced marriages, sometimes involving children, were being contracted mainly by ex-Séléka elements.

There are also numerous allegations that internally displaced person camps, most of which shelter elements of armed groups, are the locus of conflict-related sexual violence. Victims are afraid to come forward to report these crimes due to the continued presence of elements of armed groups in communities and the absence of law and order. I am very disturbed by the finding of the mission that adequate provisions were not made to assist victims of sexual violence during the year-long conflict.

There are, however, some encouraging signs that the situation could improve. The involvement of religious leaders — Muslims and Christians alike — in ongoing initiatives to reconcile communities in the Central African Republic is commendable and should be supported by the international community.

The efforts of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic, under the able leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Babacar Gaye, in the management of two delicate political transitions are worthy of high praise. In that regard, the international community, which has responded decisively in deploying the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic and the French Operation Sangaris, deserve commendation. I also welcome the recent announcement of the European Union of its intention to deploy a mission to the Central African Republic. The international community should provide the necessary support required for the implementation of resolutions 2121 (2013) and 2127 (2013).

However, important steps are required to be taken to stop the violence in the Central African Republic and limit the damage that is being inflicted on the citizens of that nation and on the conscience of humanity as a whole. The historic appointment of the first-ever female interim President of the Central African Republic is a source of hope and inspiration for all. Women's leadership at the highest levels of government is a powerful symbol of progress and change, but no leader can steer this transition alone. I therefore urge the international community to lend her its full support and cooperation so that she may be a force for unity and peace in a country that has known too much chaos and war.

Secondly, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, which should include the repatriation of foreign combatants. Immediate steps should also be taken to improve the protection of civilians. This will help dissuade the creation of community-based self-defence groups. Subsequent efforts to build a national army should take into account the application of human rights standards, as prescribed in resolutions 2121 (2013) and 2127 (2013).

Thirdly, the international community must improve the coordination of its efforts in the Central African Republic. The establishment of simple tools, such as emergency hotlines and coordinated rapid response mechanisms, can save lives. International forces operating in the Central African Republic also need to be sensitive to the specificities of the conflict, which requires an in-depth understanding of the crisis and its causes. This requires the deployment of specific expertise in civil-military coordination and the protection of civilians. Furthermore, the proactive management of regional dynamics could pay rapid dividends and lay the foundation for solving this crisis.

I congratulate the Council for its attention and the important steps it has already taken to stop the violence and ensure accountability for crimes. I commend the Council for establishing sanctions mechanisms and a commission of inquiry on human rights violations in the Central African Republic and call for their expedited implementation. The importance of deploying various fact-finding missions by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights cannot be overestimated.

Finally, I once again call for an increased focus on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence by international partners to ensure that services are available to victims of sexual violence, especially in places of displacement and isolated locations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Bangura for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kyung-wha Kang.

Ms. Kyung-wha Kang: I would like to thank you in particular, Mr. President, and the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg for giving us this opportunity to update the Security Council on the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic.

During the two months since the Arria Formula briefing by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Emergency Operations Director, the humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic has deepened. The political system has failed, security infrastructure has disintegrated, there has been a complete breakdown of law and order, and public service institutions, which were already weak and overstretched prior to the current crisis, have ceased functioning. Horrific atrocities continue to be perpetrated against ordinary people in the country, as has been so powerfully described by the previous speaker.

More than half of the country's population — 2.5 million out of 4.6 million people — have been affected by the crisis and are in need of assistance, and people across the country are living in fear. More than 900,000 people have fled their homes and are internally displaced, including some 480,000 in the capital, Bangui, alone. At the airport in Bangui around 100,000 people are sleeping out in the open with little access to basic services and very limited supplies. Outside Bangui, thousands of people are hiding in the forest with no aid or services, too afraid to come out. Half of the displaced are children.

In addition to those internally displaced, some 86,000 Central Africans have fled as refugees and sought protection in neighbouring countries over the last year, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but also in Chad, Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo. This brings the total number of Central African Republic refugees in the subregion to 246,000. Some 28,000 third-country nationals have been evacuated from the Central African Republic since the crisis escalated in mid-December 2013.

We have received horrendous reports of people being killed or injured while attempting to flee the violence. Just a couple of days ago, a convoy carrying mostly Muslim families being evacuated from the village of Vakap and ultimately destined for refuge in neighbouring Cameroon was reportedly stopped in Bouar, northwestern Central African Republic, and attacked by people carrying grenades and machetes. At least 3 children and 19 adults were killed, and at least 23 people, including children, were injured.

The crisis in the Central African Republic is a top priority for the international humanitarian community. On 11 December 2013, we activated our highest level of response, known as a level 3 system-wide humanitarian emergency activation. We have reinforced humanitarian leadership on the ground through the deployment of a Senior Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Abdou Dieng. We have also sent our most experienced and skilled staff, released emergency funds and mobilized relief supplies and pipelines. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals met twice this month to take stock of the situation and identity areas needing urgent attention. OCHA's Emergency Operations Director was back in the country just last week to meet with humanitarian partners and communities affected by the crisis.

On the ground, non-governmental organization partners and the staff of humanitarian United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are working closely with civil society and religious leaders from all communities to deliver assistance in a very dangerous and unpredictable environment. The World Food Programme has mobilized food for around 315,000 people in December and January. Médecins Sans Frontières is leading medical assistance. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has provided crucial relief items, including blankets and mattresses, for some 20,000 people this month, and thousands more will receive relief in the coming days. UNICEF and the World Health Organization have supported the Ministry of Health and other partners to vaccinate some 72,500 children at 17 sites this month. The International Organization for Migration is monitoring displacement and airlifting thousands of stranded migrants from the Central African Republic with priority attention given to the most vulnerable, such as those needing medical attention.

One of our main challenges to date has been the international community's chronic underfunding of the crisis. Last week, we revised the humanitarian appeal, taking into account the rapidly deteriorating situation. We now require over $551 million for our response in 2014.

On that point we have good news. At the High-Level Meeting on Humanitarian Action in the Central African Republic, which was co-chaired in Brussels on Monday by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos, and the European Union Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, Member States generously pledged over $200 million for humanitarian assistance and an additional $280 million for development and long-term reconstruction. Those very welcome pledges will allow us to provide life-saving food, drinking water, shelter and health care for the next few months. However, we need much more.

Humanitarian assistance cannot solve the situation in the Central African Republic. The collapsing State, after years of neglect and failure by the international community to heed the warning signs of a looming crisis, cannot be shored up with humanitarian assistance. Security and stability must be urgently restored.

The ongoing deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, supported by French troops, has had a positive effect in the areas where it is operating, and the political developments over the past week, including the designation of a new interim President and the agreement of the European Union to deploy troops, have given people in the Central African Republic hope. However, they remain fearful and sceptical in the light of the horror that they have seen and endured. The international community must consider all options for re-establishing security.

The international response must also build stronger and more resilient communities in the Central African Republic. We need to look beyond today and take immediate action to restore livelihoods, preserve community support structures and strengthen local economies in order to provide a foundation for early recovery and long-term development.

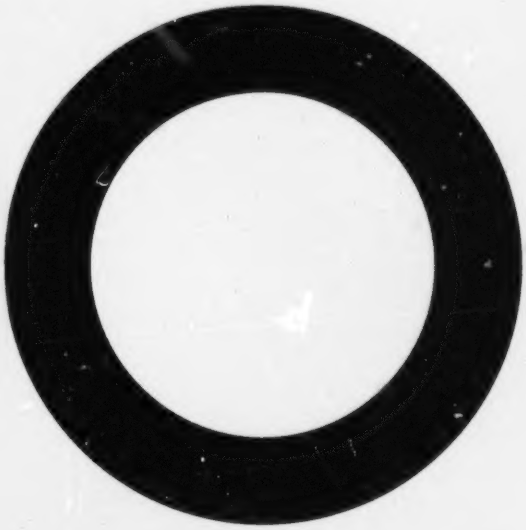
The root causes of the conflict, including lack of effective, inclusive and efficient governance institutions, poor management and distribution of access to natural resources, including diamonds, fragile social cohesion and deep-seated feelings of marginalization must be urgently addressed. We need to support civil society, religious leaders and local communities as they strive to heal the wounds of violent conflict, rebuild social cohesion, stabilize communities and reduce sectarian violence, including through interfaith dialogue. Community reconciliation is crucial to protecting the internally displaced people in the Central African Republic.

We have already seen the human cost of the international community's neglect of the Central African Republic. We need to act urgently.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Kang for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.



United Nations
S/PV.7099

Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7099th meeting

Thursday, 23 January 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Ms. Millicay
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Ms. Maes
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in Mali

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contribution to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2014/2.

It is so decided.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.